HE DREW AS HE PLEASED

ALBERT HURTER

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A SKETCHBOOK BY

ALBERT HURTER

SIMON AND SCHUSTER • NEW YORK

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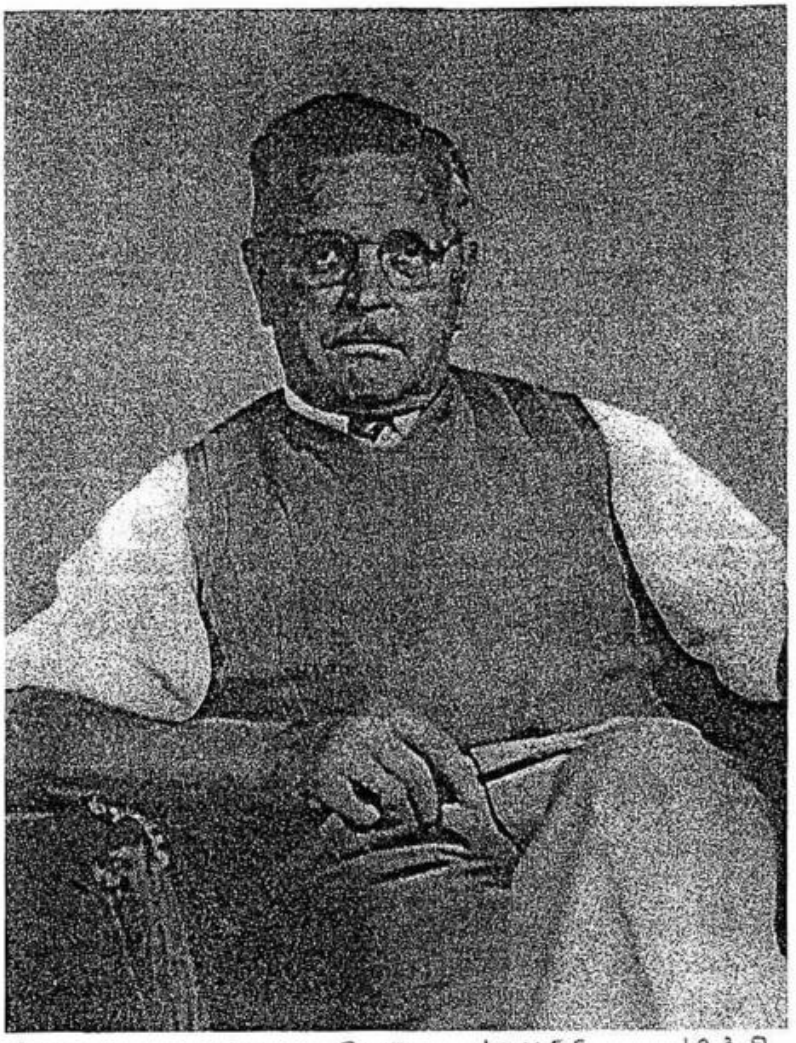


PHOTO BY BOB JONES 1939

ALBERT HURTER

Back in 1916, when the nation's movie patrons were being thrilled by the lavishness of D. W. Griffith, the profile of Bushman, the curves of Kellerman, and the lightning gun play of Bill Hart, the studio of Raoul Barre was busily turning out animated cartoons at the rate of one a week, in a loft above Peter Stieb's barber shop. To this beehive of artistic activity, opposite Fordham University's campus, came a succession of art students, sign painters, engravers, newspaper cartoonists, and amateur humorists, all eager to contribute their talents to this novel and intriguing art form.

One of these recruits was Albert Hurter, a young Swiss illustrator, soft-spoken and sedate, whose portfolio of samples immediately established him in this strange field of cinematic endeavor. Hurter quietly settled down to the task of turning out his fifty to one hundred drawings each day in a smooth and methodical manner that Barre and the staff considered nothing short of phenomenal. Yet those who observed him closely soon realized he had no intention of being sensational or spectacular.

Drawing, as far as Albert was concerned, was a natural, unlabored function, no more complicated than his other two hobbies, smoking and reading. Fifteen years or more of diligent study in the academies of Switzerland and France, both as a student and as an instructor, had enabled him to draw anything from a full-rigged schooner to a regiment of cavalry without the slightest difficulty. Everything that Hurter saw, heard, or read seemed to be indelibly registered in his memory. In a sense he had a camera eye, but the imaginative quality he put into his drawing lifted it far above the level of mere photographic accuracy.

There were many amazing sides to Albert's personality, but the keynote of it was honesty, an honesty so naive that it was often mistaken for lack of tact.

One young artist who had labored for days on an impressive perspective drawing of a crowded hotel lobby, replete with architectural details, proudly presented it to Hurter for criticism. "Please be frank about this, Mr. Hurter; don't spare my feelings . . . just tell me if there's anything wrong with this," he requested. Albert studied the drawing, turned to the lad, and solemnly remarked, "Nothing is right with this."

Extremely modest, he never considered his own work worthy of praise, and he judged the product of other artists without prejudice or flattery. He had a genuine respect for academic art, yet also admired any modernist whose work reflected sincerity and true merit.

After two years at the Fordham studio, Hurter turned toward Mexico and the Southwest. Desert and Indians fascinated him, and he spent the remainder of his life in the Western states. In Los Angeles he developed a modest commercial art studio, occasionally turning his hand to bits of animation for Hollywood producers.

Then the talking pictures appeared—closely followed by the rapid growth of sound cartoons. In 1932 the popularity of Mickey Mouse and the Silly Symphonies drew Hurter to the Walt Disney Studio, for he was anxious to return to the field in which he had pioneered sixteen years earlier. Disney custom soon discarded the surname of Hurter and the prefix "Mr." He became Albert and remained Albert to the end.

Walt was the first cartoon producer to appreciate the special talents of the individual artist and allow him to concentrate upon the thing he did best. Since Albert's outstanding ability lay in humorous exaggeration and the humanizing of inanimate objects, he was soon released from animating and set to work drawing inspirational sketches. Each time a new subject was planned, Albert was consulted and given free rein to let his imagination wander, creating strange animals, plants, scenery, or costumes that might serve as models for the forthcoming production.

Some subjects appealed to him more than others; consequently these brought forth a greater variety of sketches. Disney had found the ideal outlet for Albert's talents.

Frequently, when on a definite assignment, his mind and pencil would wander far afield and the results would be weird and surprising—often furnishing the inspiration for an entirely new subject. His pencil was never idle. Grotesque figures, faces, and unexplainable forms verging on surrealism appeared in the upper right-hand corner of nearly every one of his drawings.

When the idea for *Three Little Pigs* began to develop, it was Albert who designed the principal characters, their costumes, and their respective homes. Later, while *Snow White* was in preparation, he spent many months on hundreds of preliminary drawings, experimenting with dwarfs, witches, birds, animals, decorative details, and imaginative backgrounds that contributed much to the quaintness and charm of this production.

The ingenious little clocks on the woodcarver's shelves in *Pinocchio,* the animals in *Bambi,* mythological creatures of *Fantasia,* and countless other cartoon creations and personalities can trace their origin to Albert's drawing board.

Albert was methodical by nature and was always the first member of the Disney staff to arrive at the Studio each morning. He remained at his desk all day, left promptly at five o'clock, spent his evenings reading, and retired early. Night life and theaters held no charm for him.

Whenever possible, he drove thousands of miles through Arizona and New Mexico, far from the beaten highways, studying desert landscapes and rock formations. He never sketched during these trips. They were for observation only. The sketches would appear weeks or even months after his return.

Albert's exacting nature asserted itself in another hobby, the collecting of rare stamps. He was known to dealers and philatelists everywhere because of his integrity in trading and his keen sense of values. He rejected everything but the finest specimens and handled these with meticulous care. On one of his infrequent trips to the theater he was greatly shocked at a newsreel in which Franklin D. Roosevelt held a rare stamp between his fingertips, instead of using the prescribed tweezers. To Albert, this innocent action constituted a form of vandalism, and his faith in the New Deal was considerably shaken.

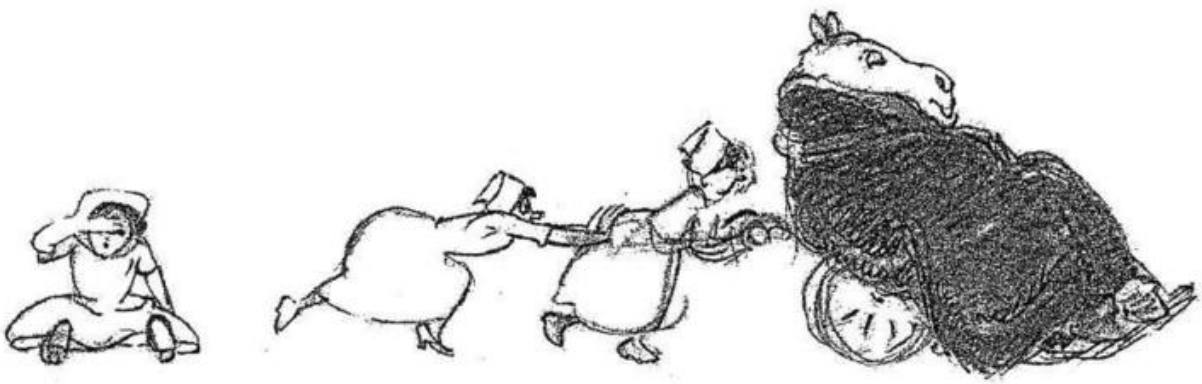
During the various stages of his career, Albert worked in many mediums—charcoal, oils, water color, and pen and ink, but unfortunately none of those paintings and illustrations are available today. He never kept a collection of his own work. The drawings published here represent but a small selection of the many thousands that he produced during the last ten years of his life. Perhaps the finest tribute to his work is the fact that so little of it can be located. His sketches were eagerly sought by the animators, model designers, gagmen, and writers. They circulated freely about the Studio, with the result that few were returned

to the files. This never disturbed Albert, for he derived all of his pleasure from drawing. As soon as the creative process was over, he seemed to have little interest in the finished result.

In 1941, Albert moved from his quarters in Los Angeles to a spacious stone lodge in the San Fernando Valley. He intended to furnish it as a combined studio and library, where he could quietly pursue his hobbies, but his health failed him before these plans were completed. During the final months he never abandoned his sketch pad. He managed to find humor even in his hospital surroundings, as some of the pages here will attest.

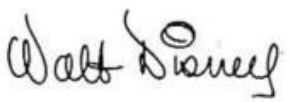
In presenting this book to the public, we who knew Albert Hurter feel that it should interest artist and layman alike, simply because it represents the natural, unrestrained skill and humor of a man who drew as he pleased, for the pleasure of drawing.

T. S.

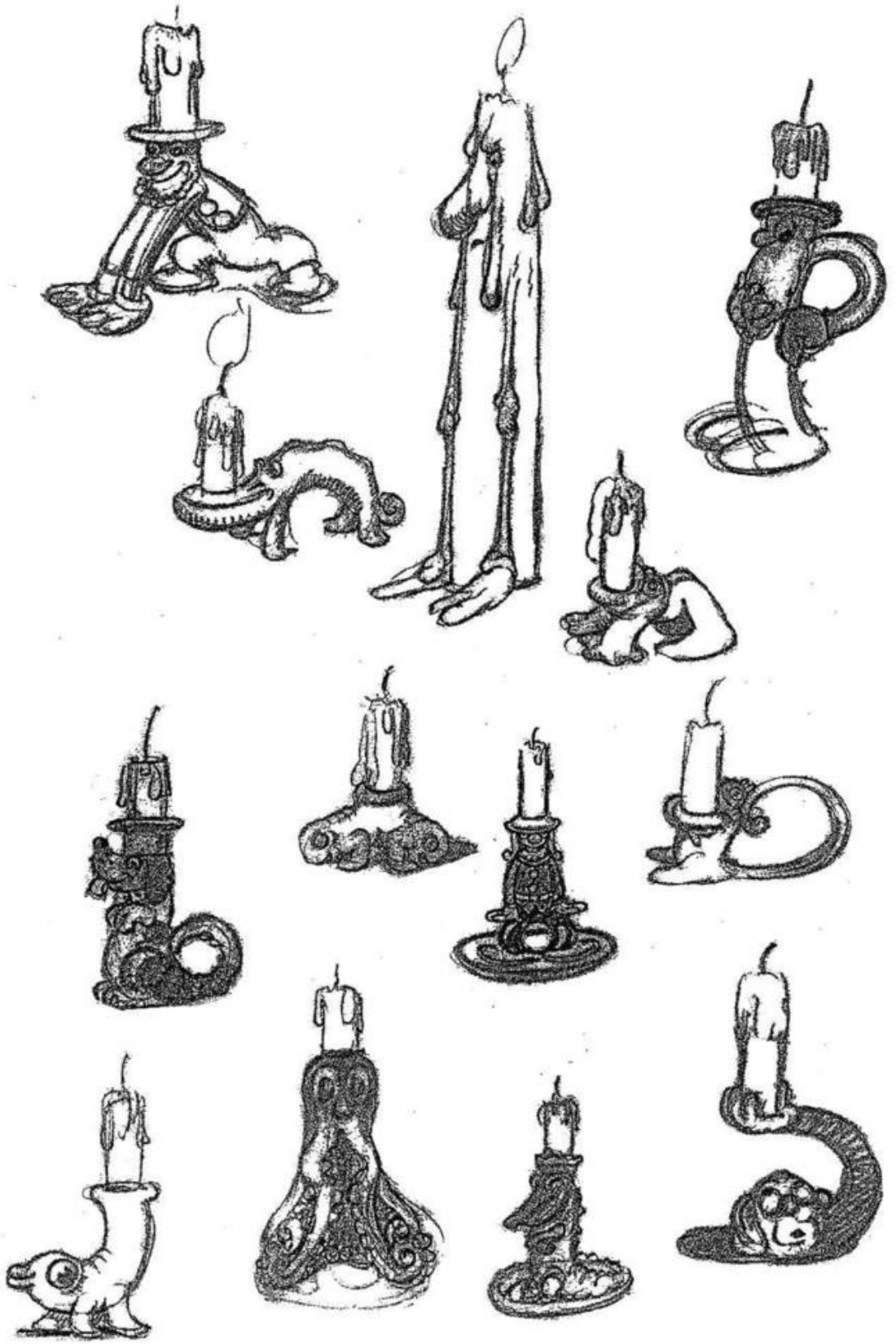


ALBERT HURTER was a master creator of fantasy. In his whimsical imagination all things were possible.

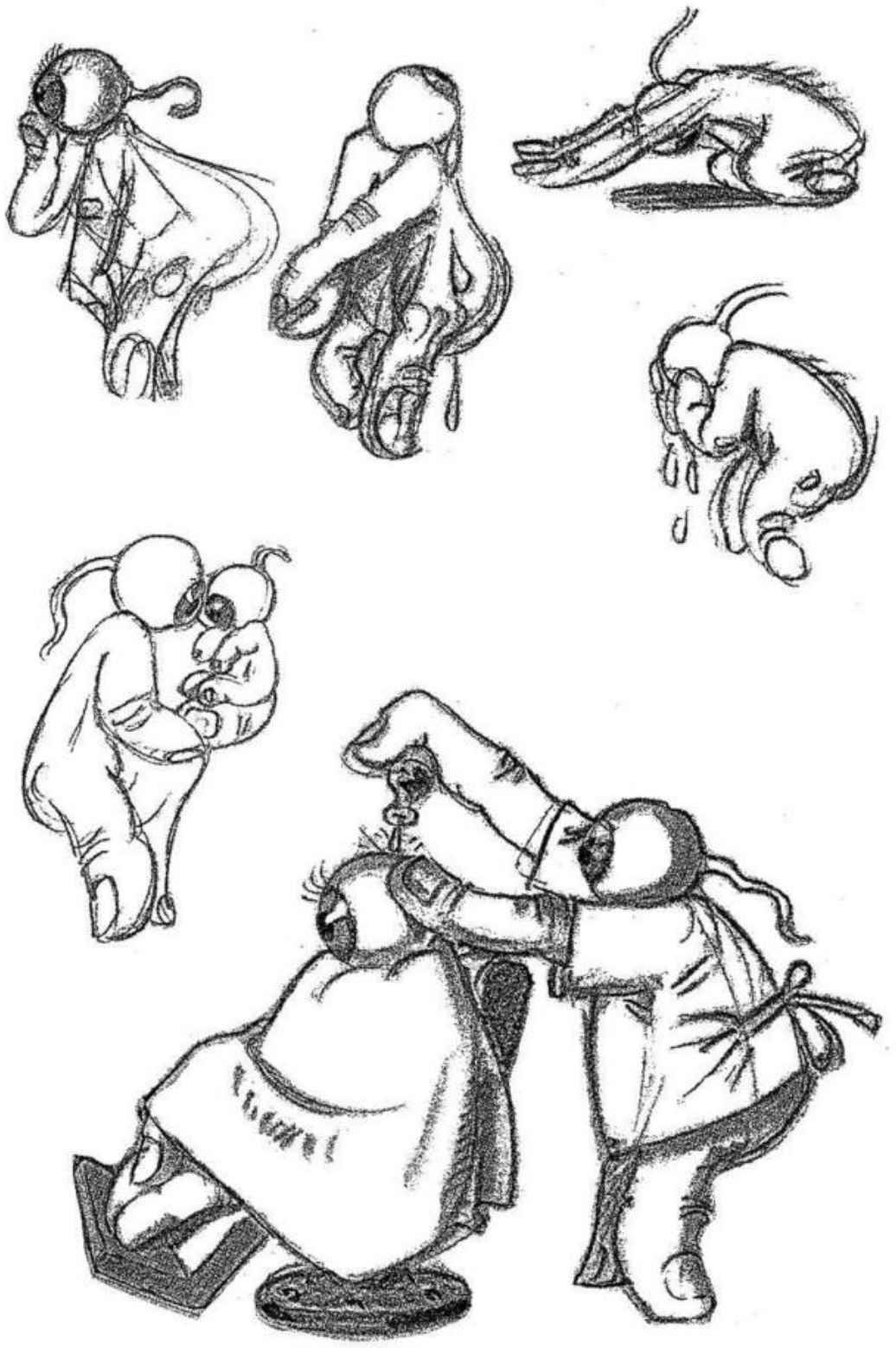
The sketches in this book testify not only to his rare sense of humor but also to his genuine ability as an artist.



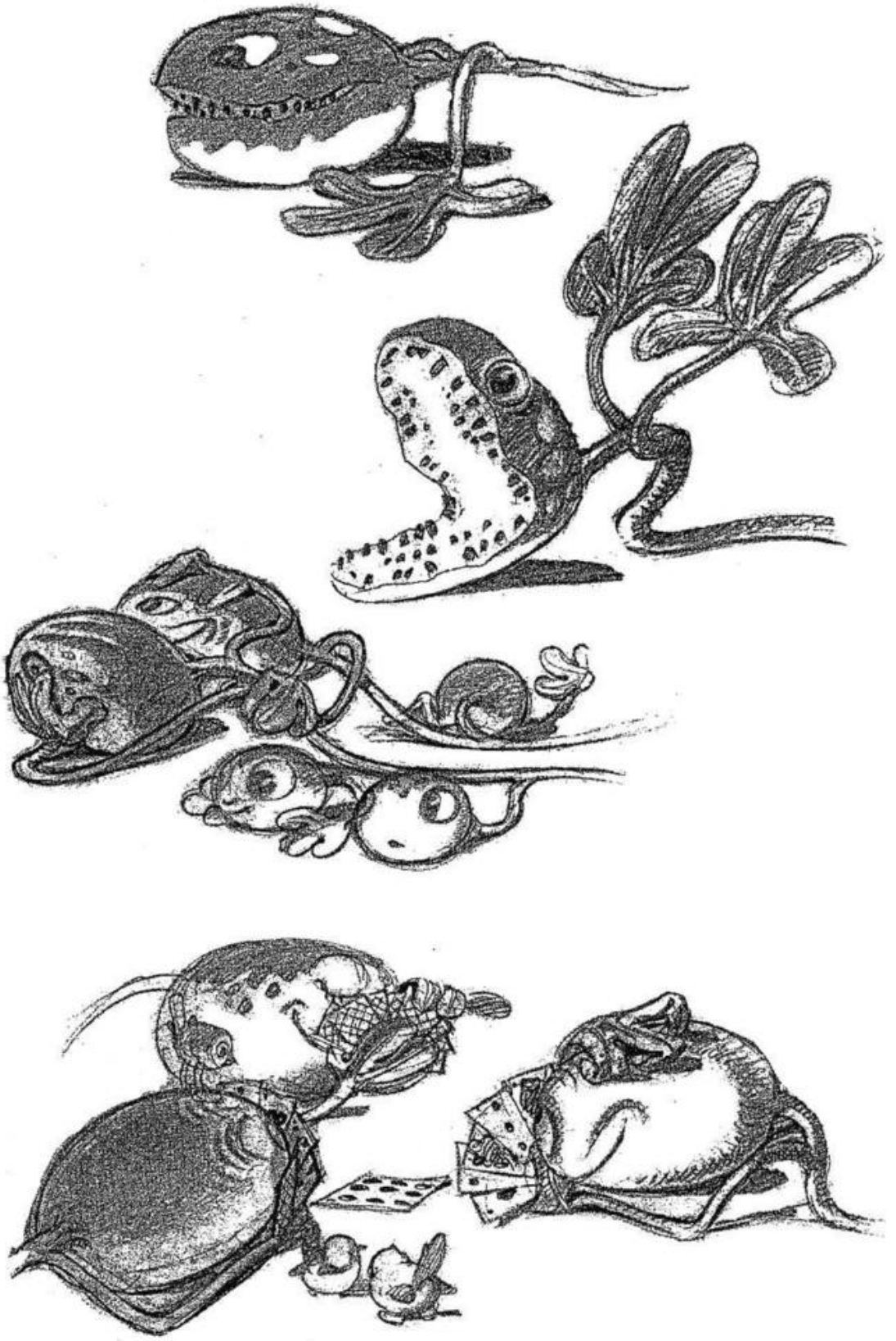
For Albert there were no inanimate objects

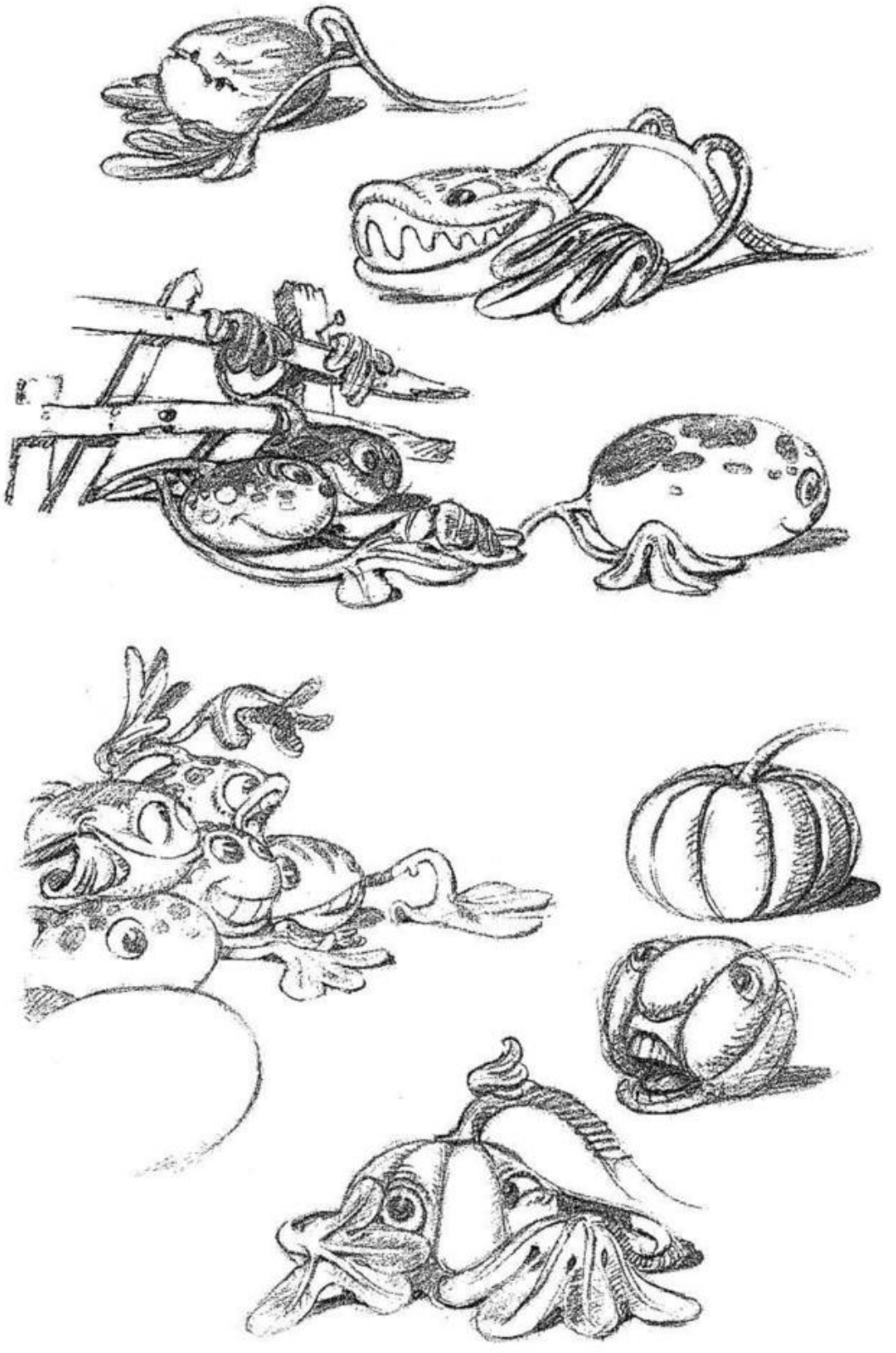


Eyeball folk



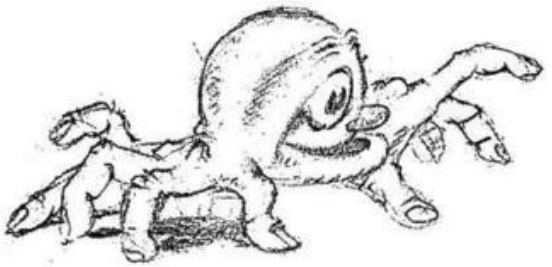
Even melons came to life . . .

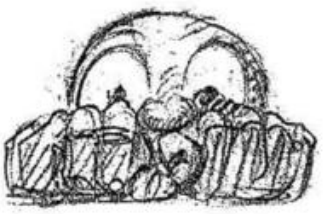


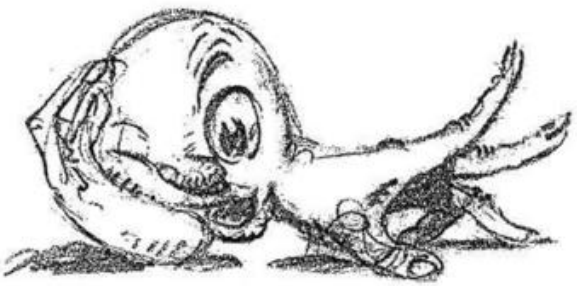


Atmosphere . . . "Mickey in Arabia"

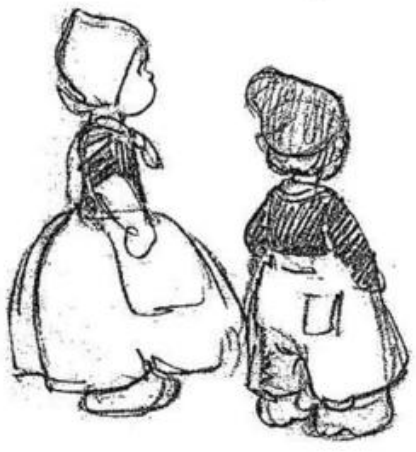
Men of parts



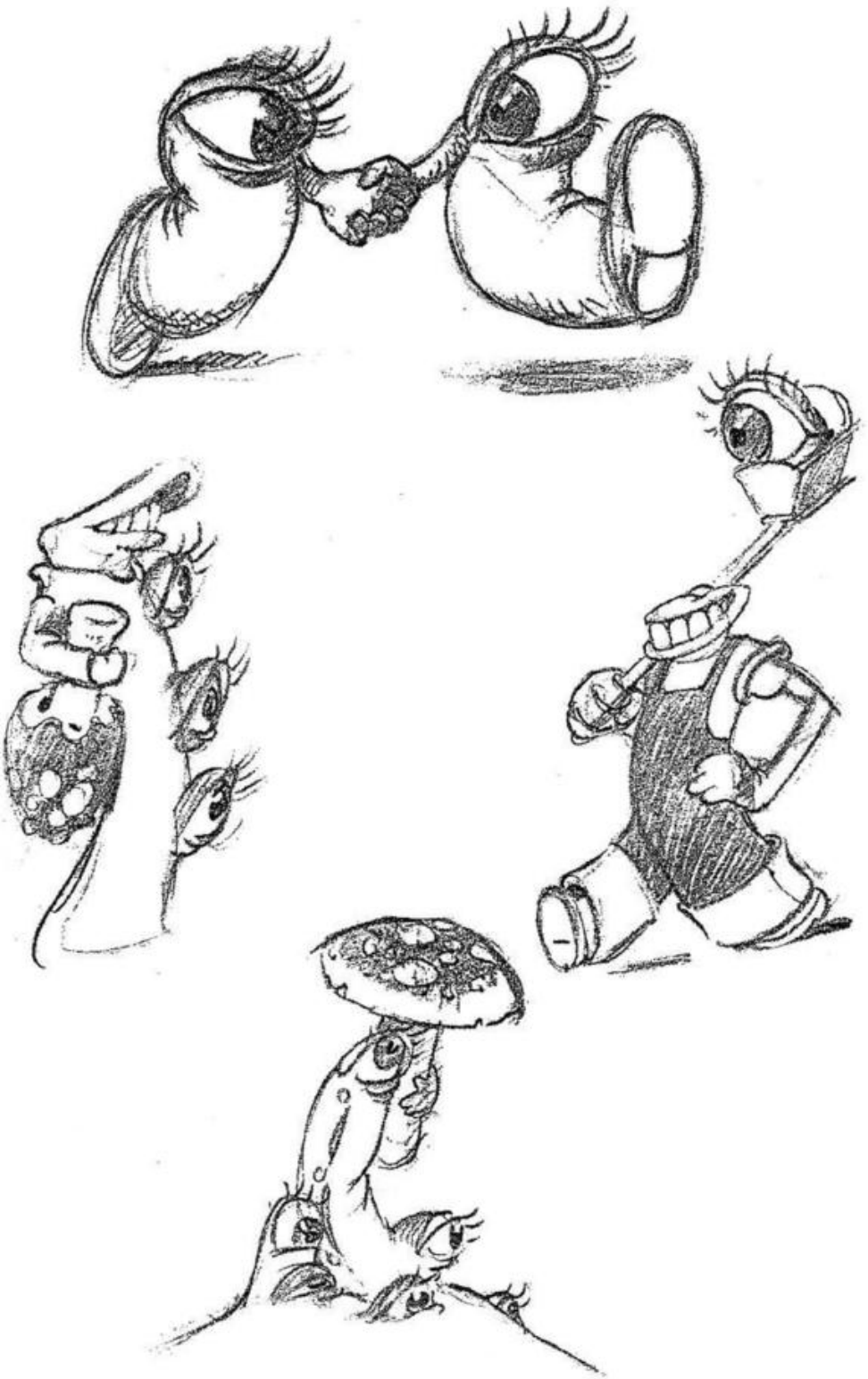


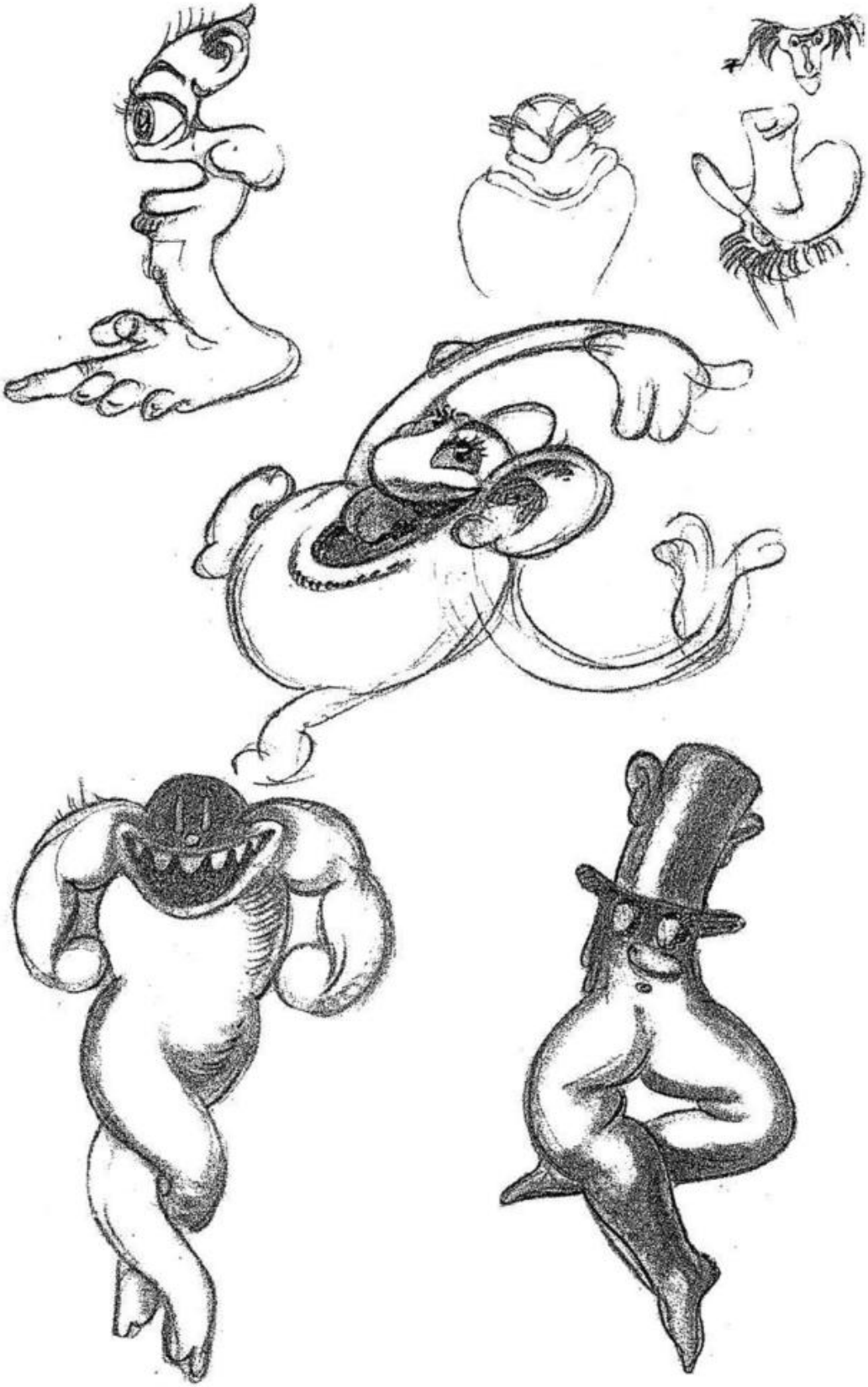


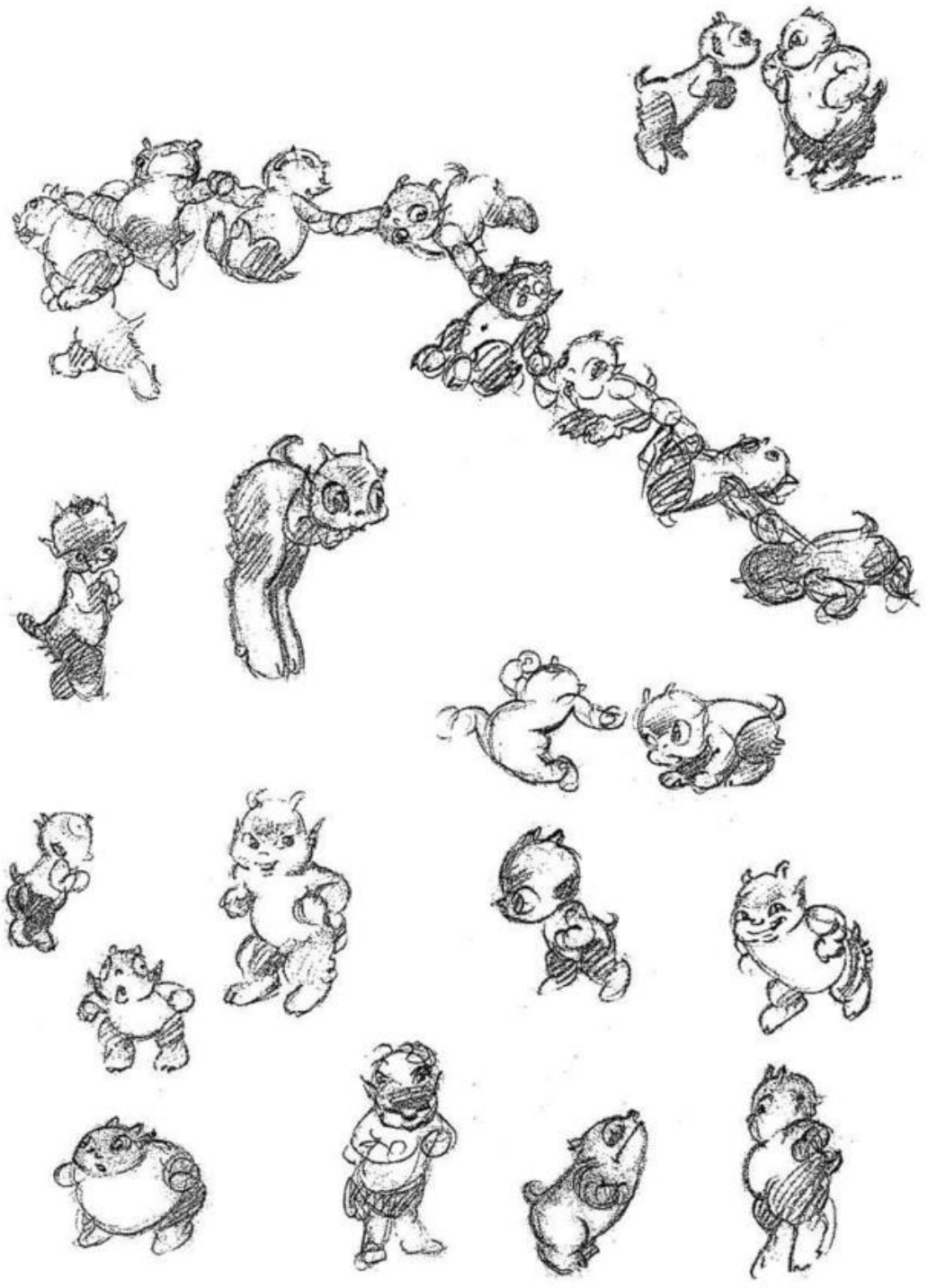
Hansel and Gretel



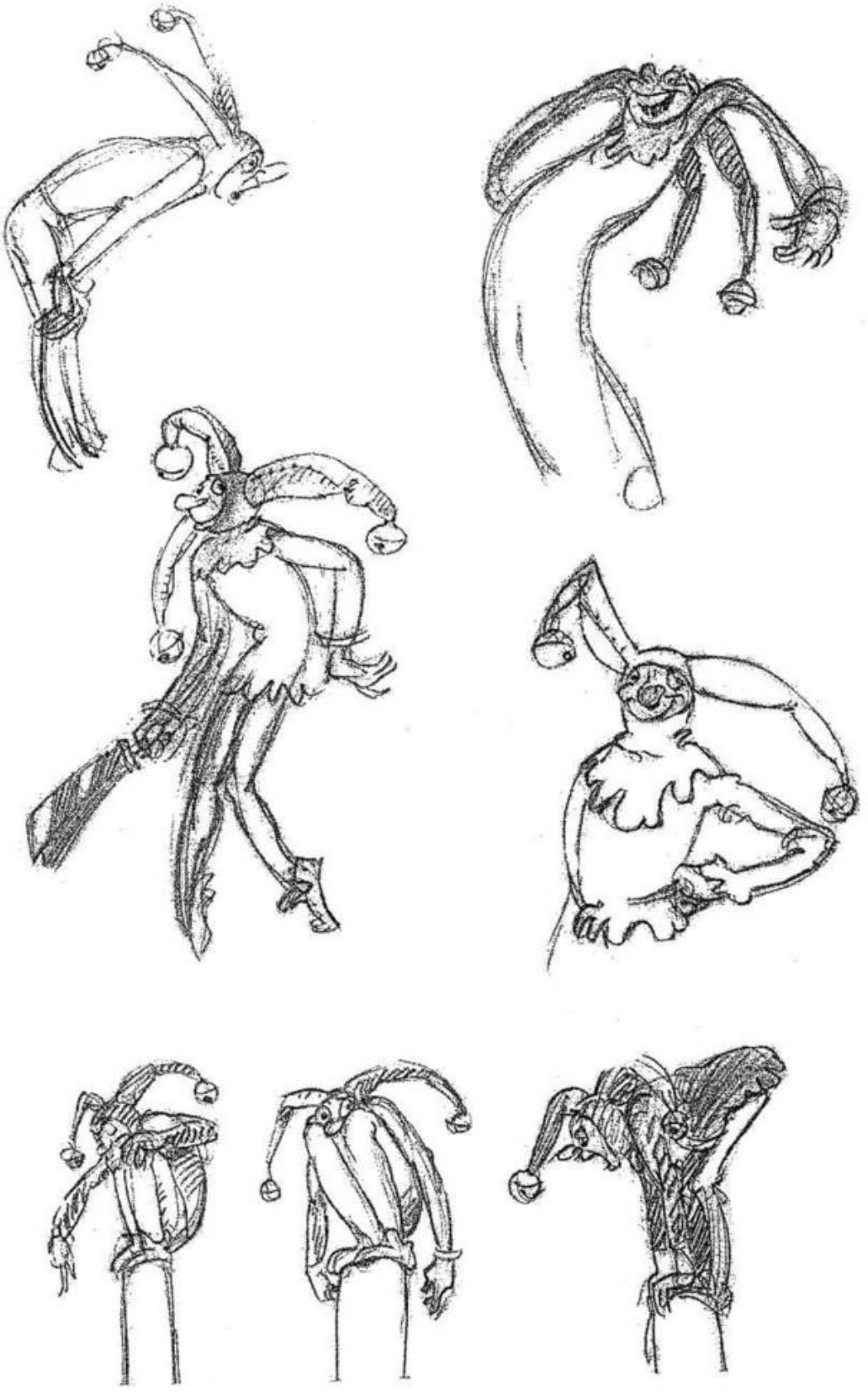
Players for a musical fantasy

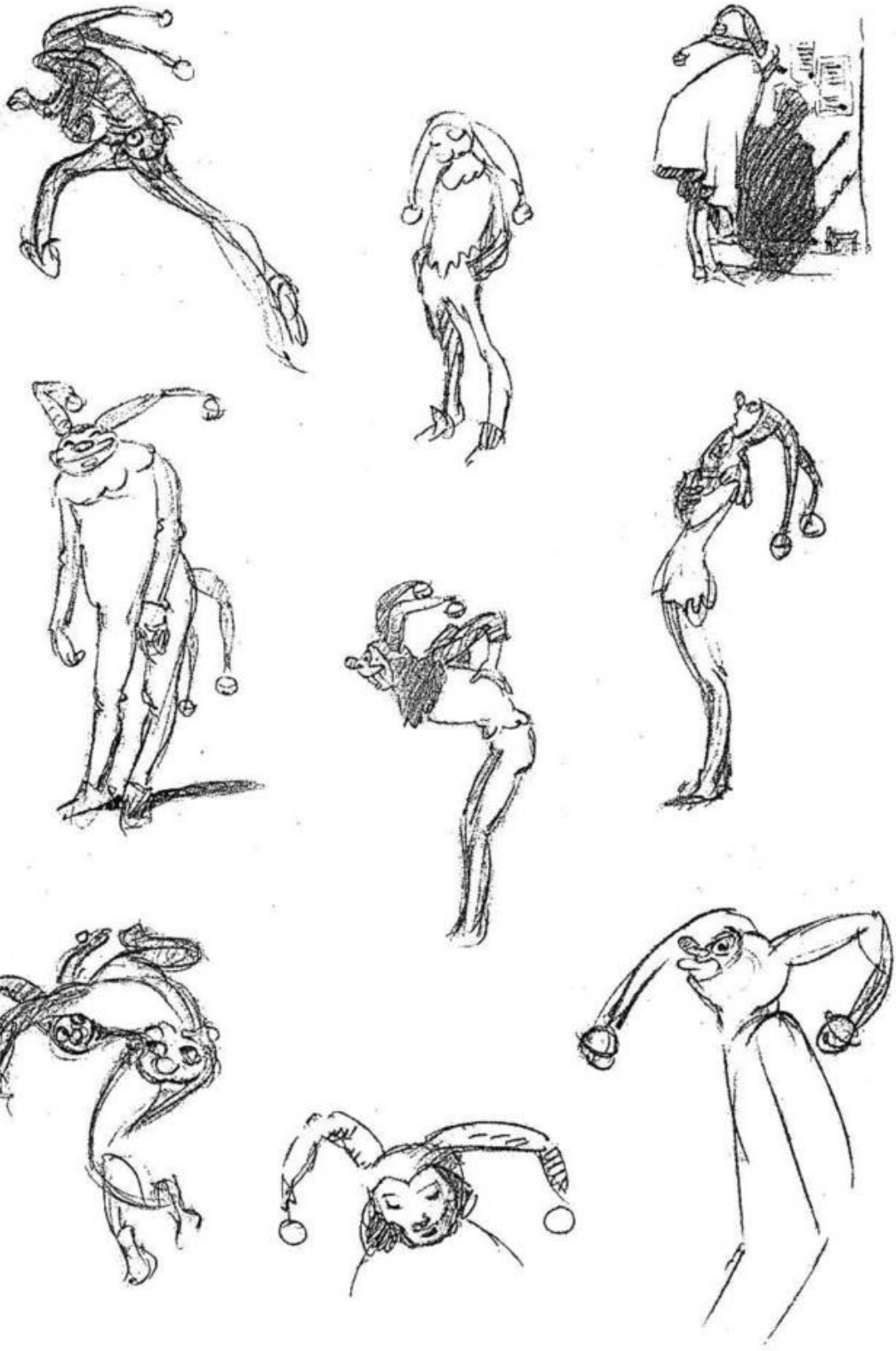


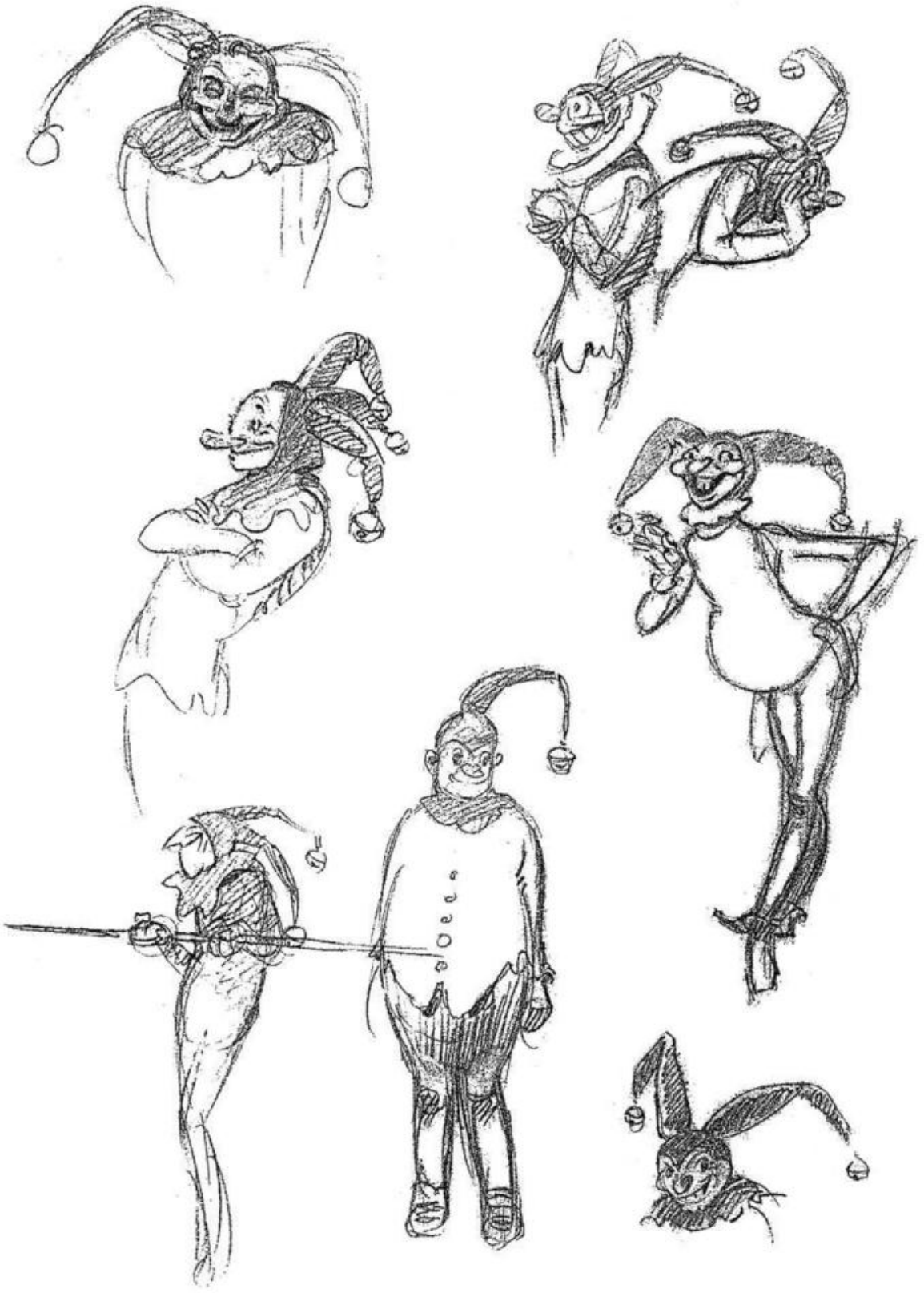


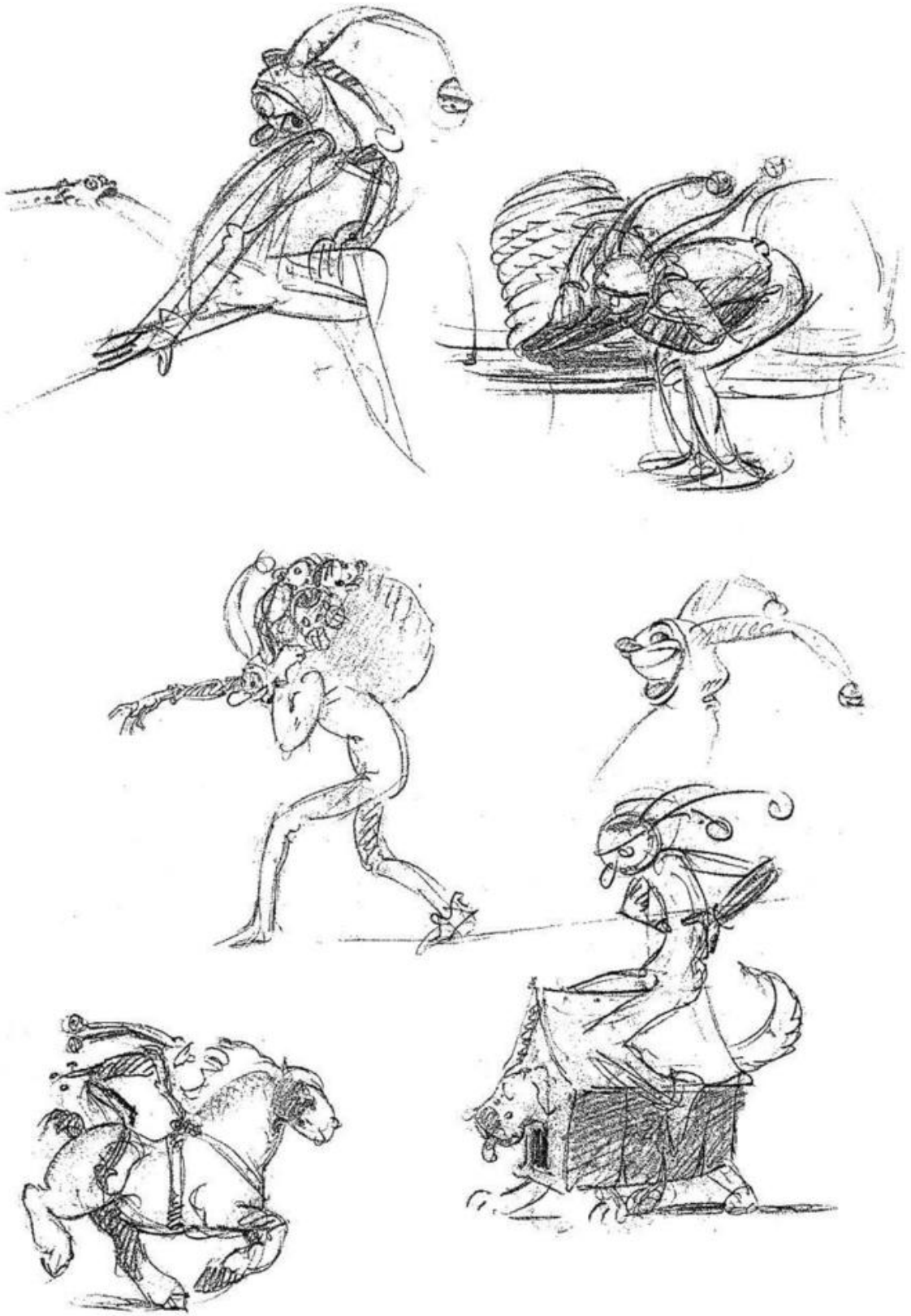


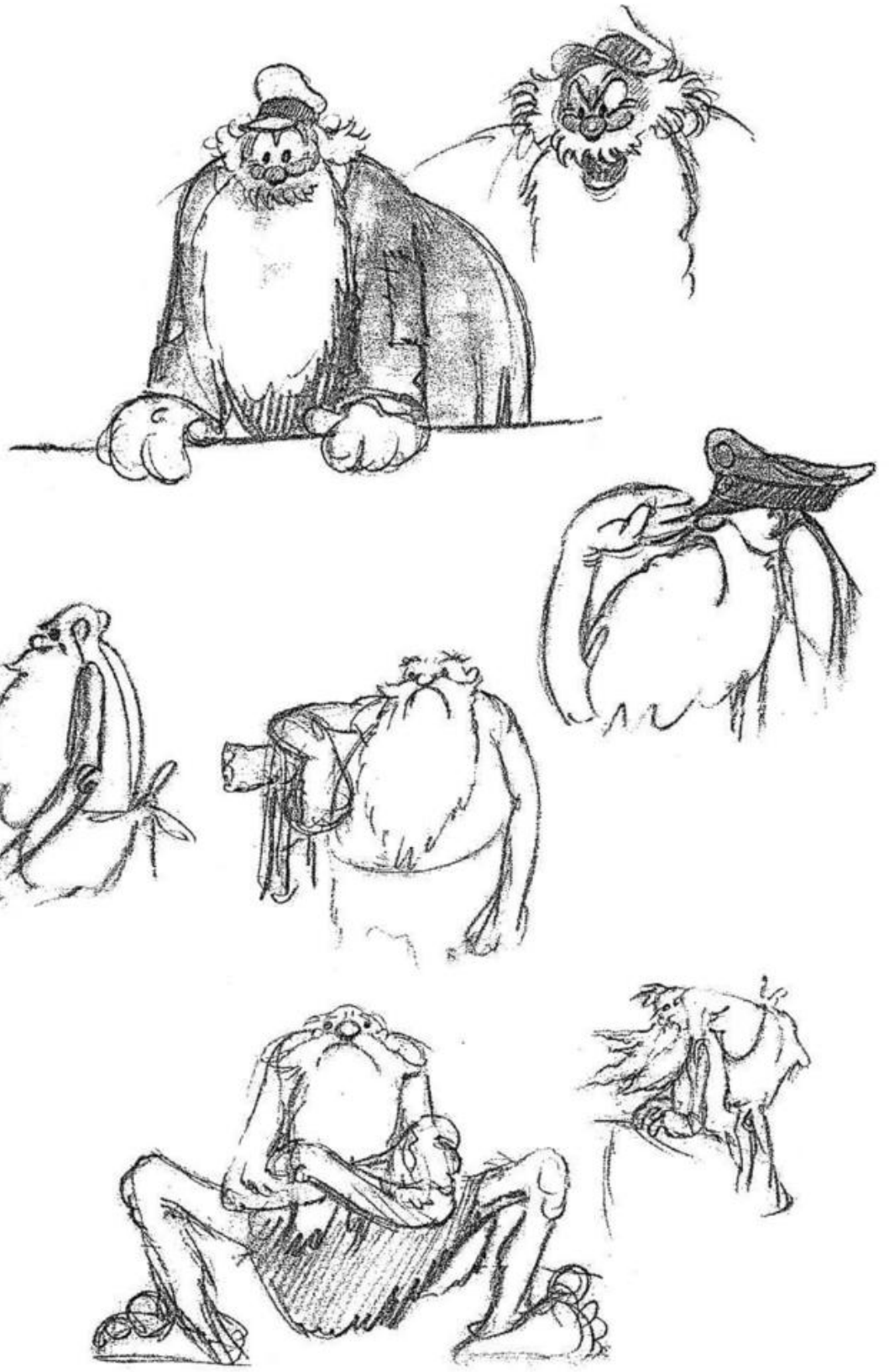
Big Race
Today
Dead or Alive

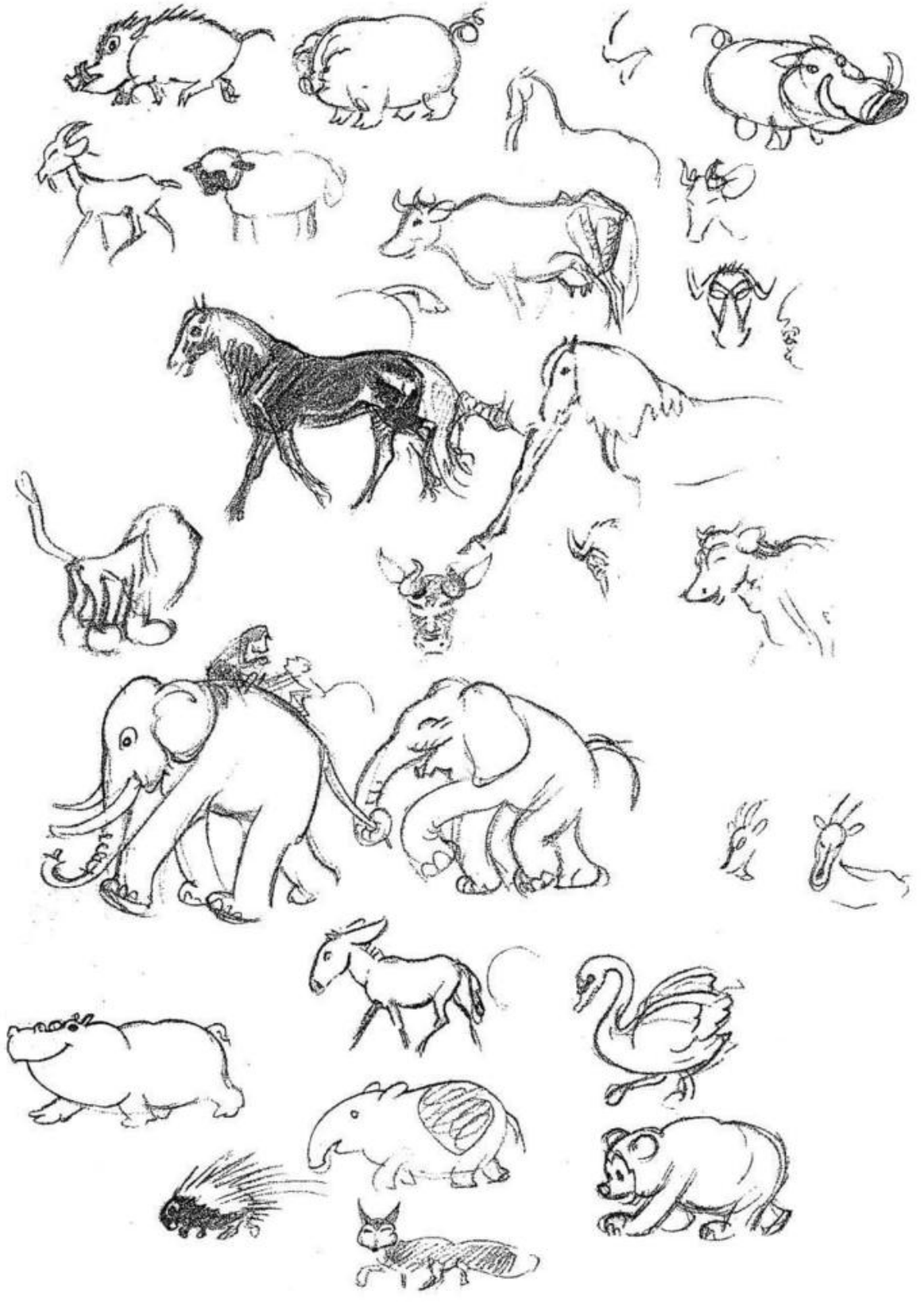


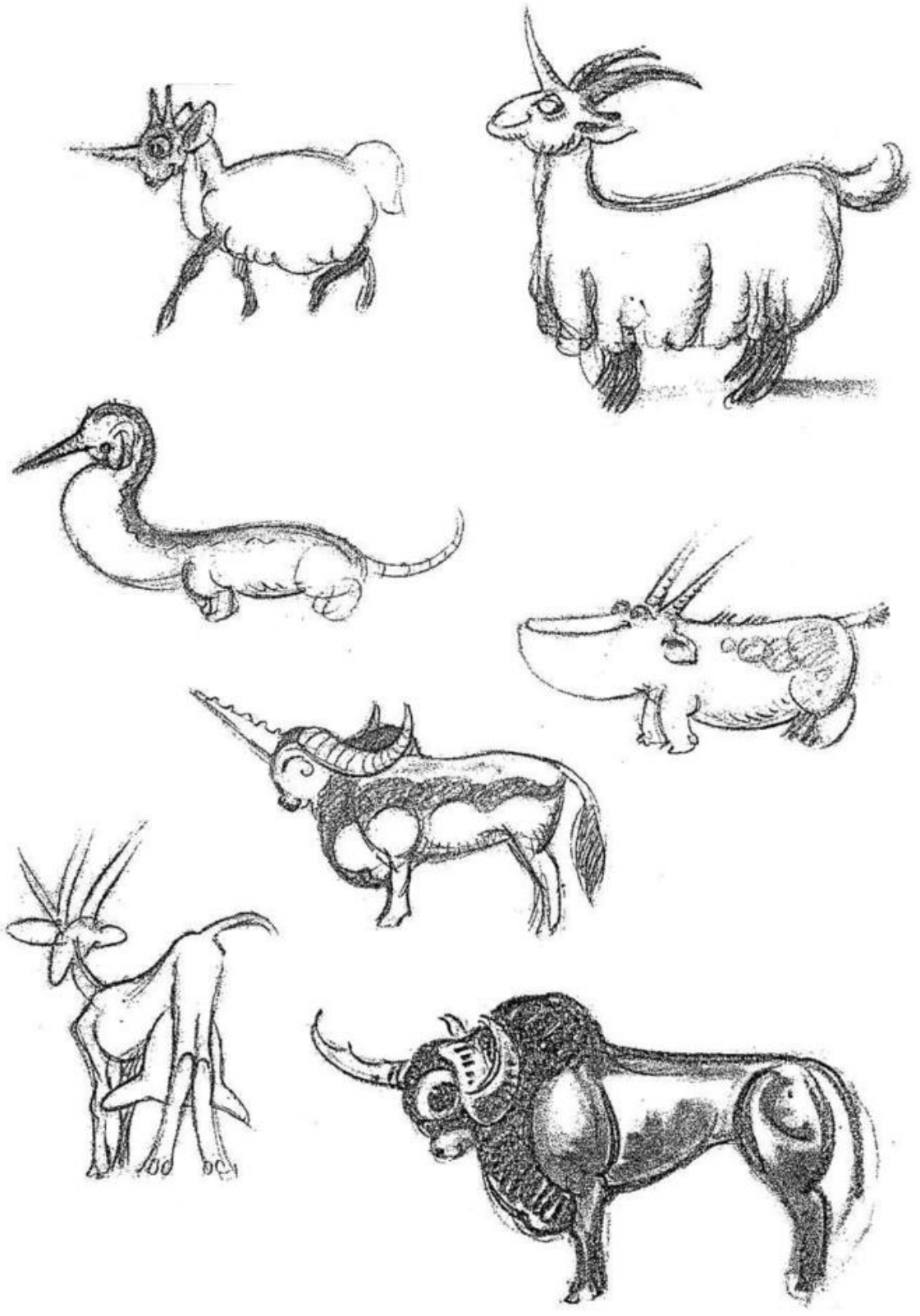


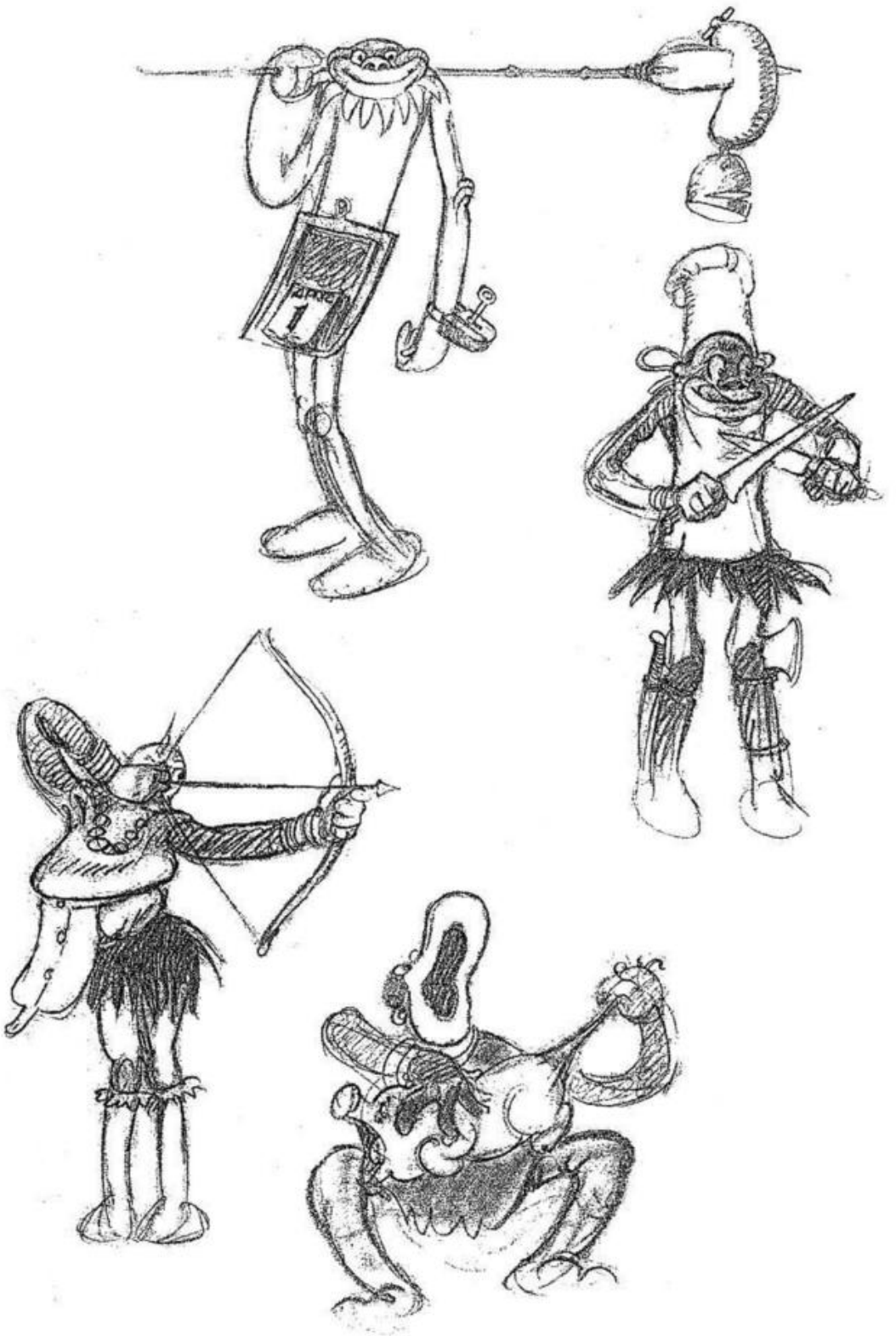


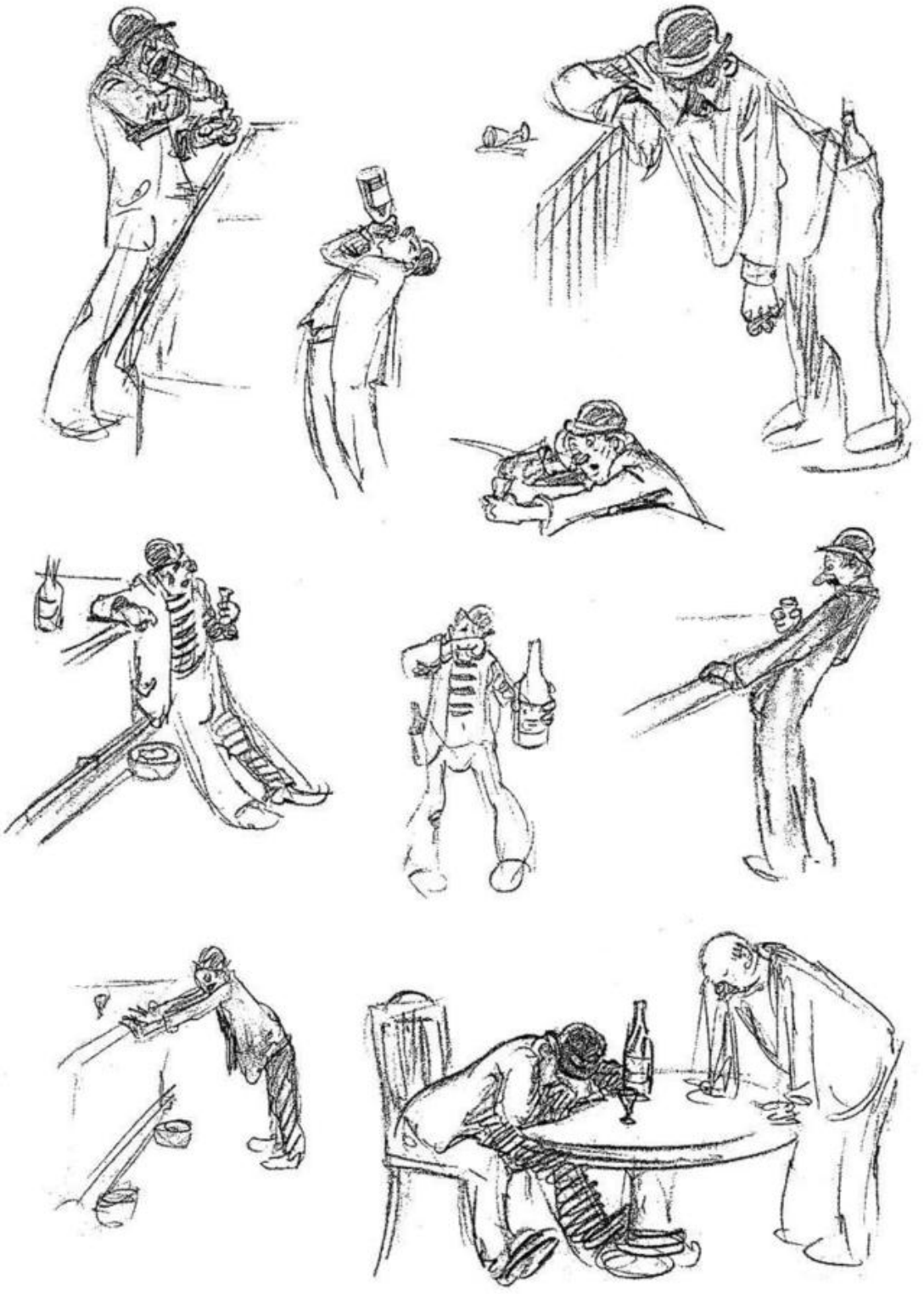


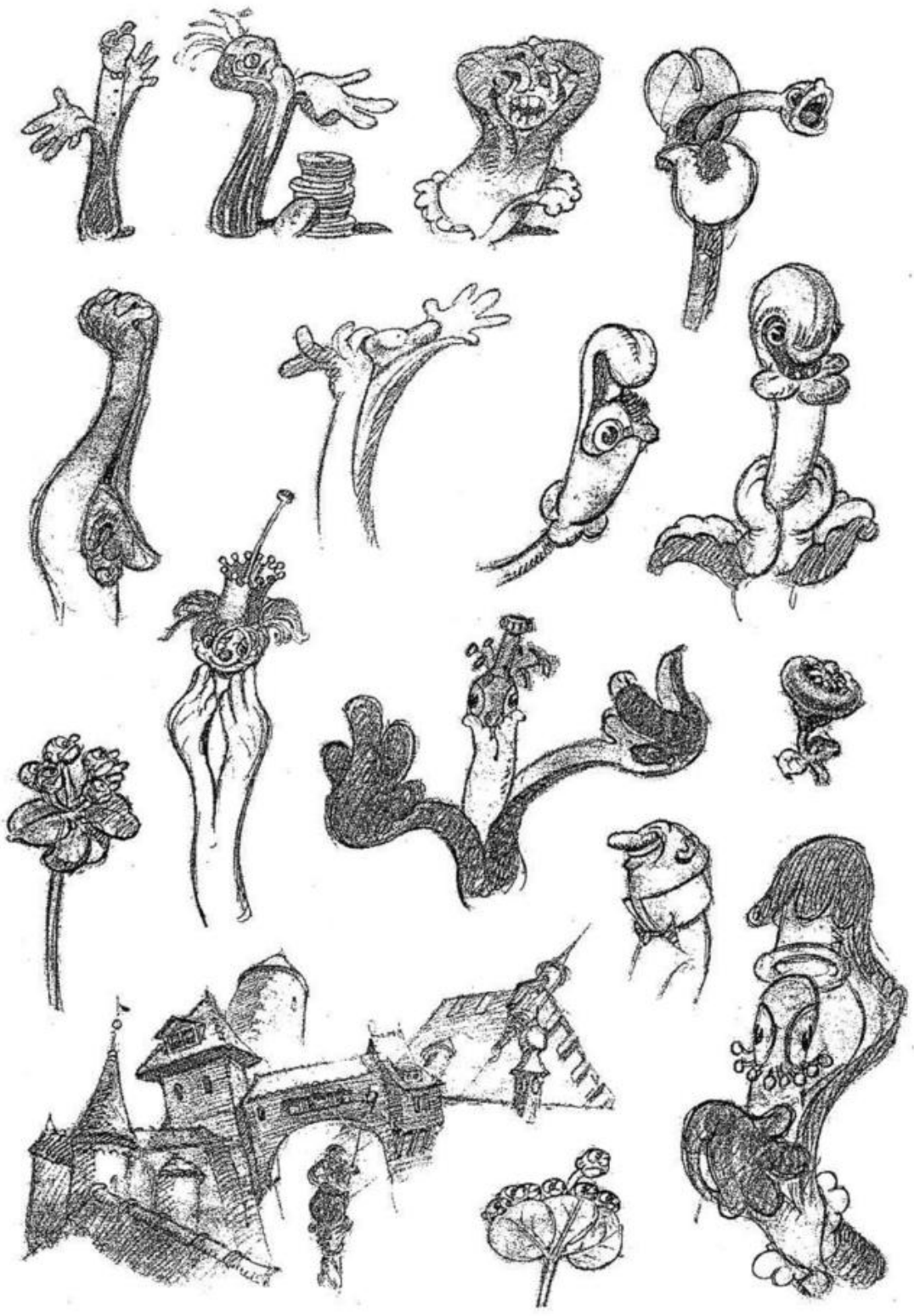


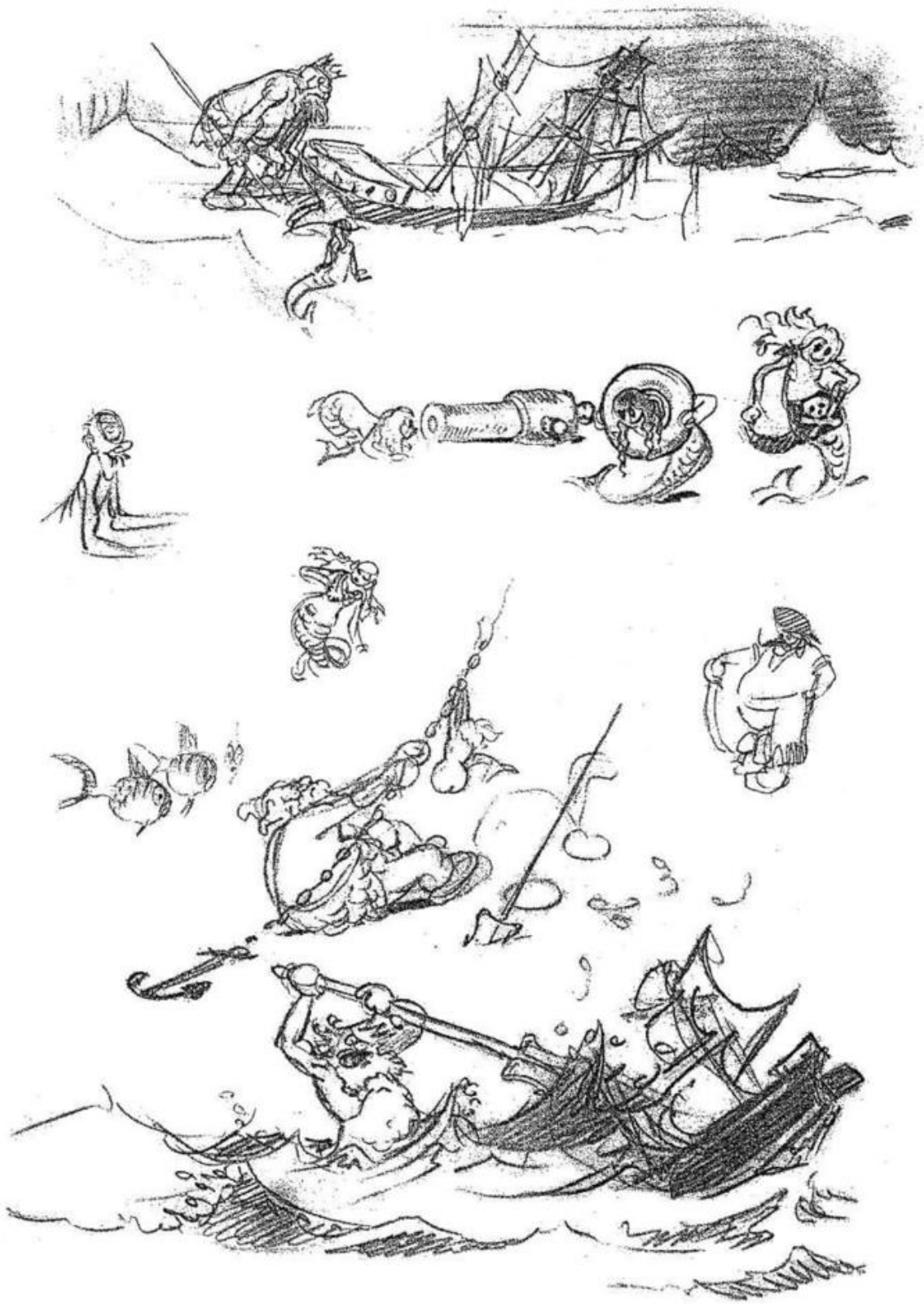


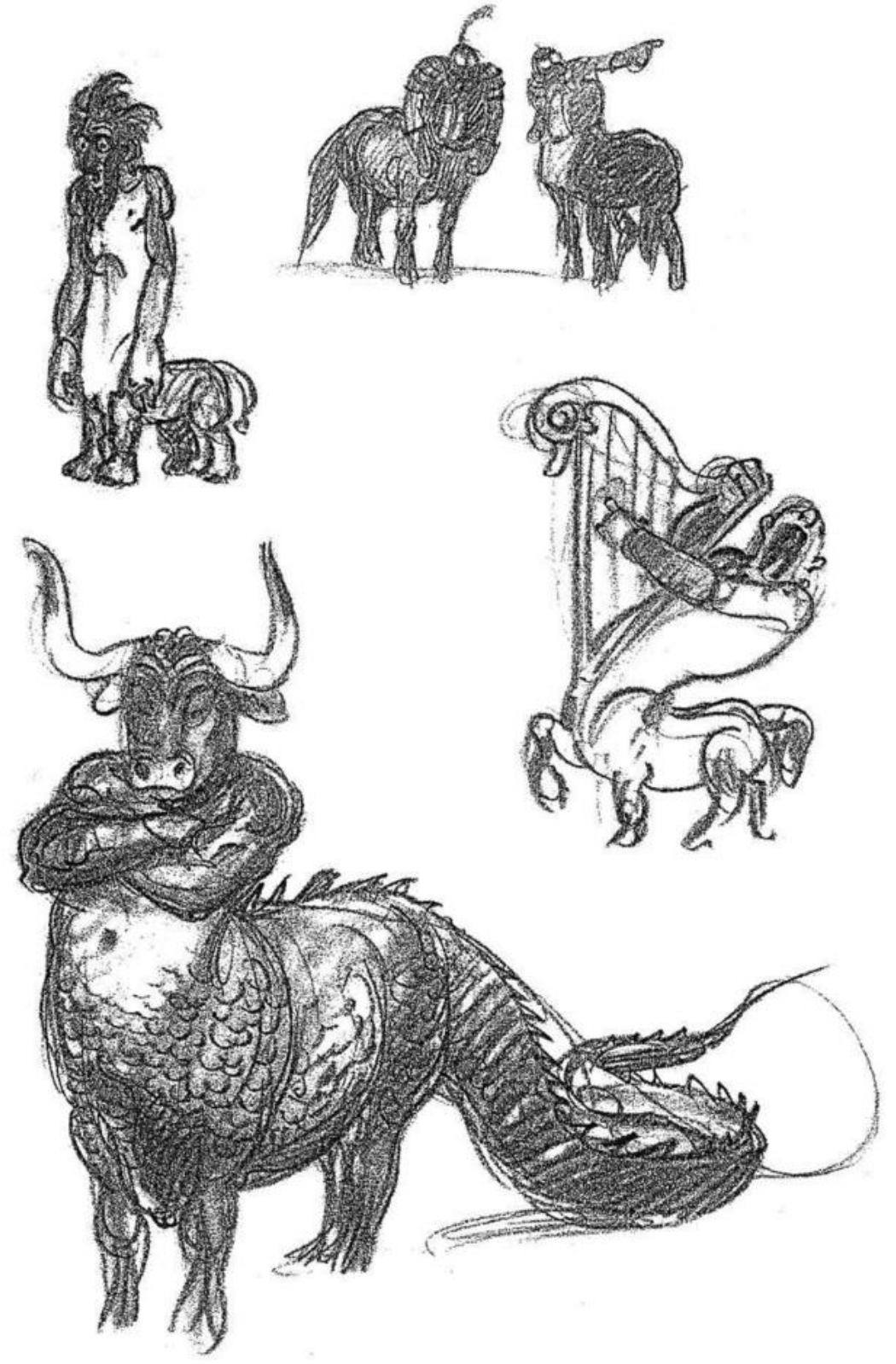


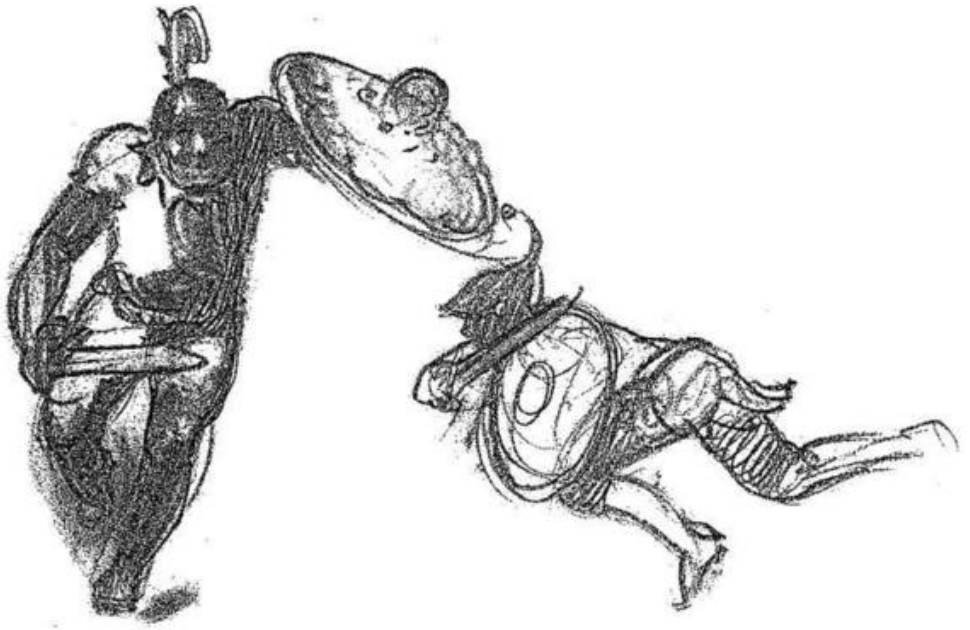


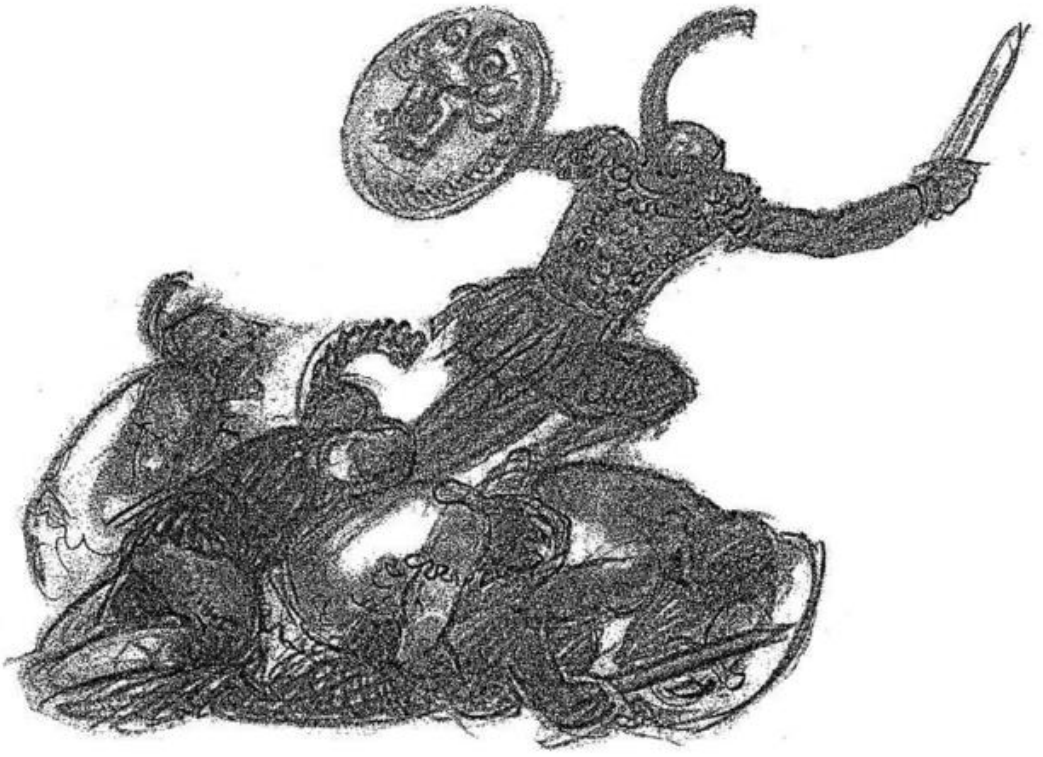


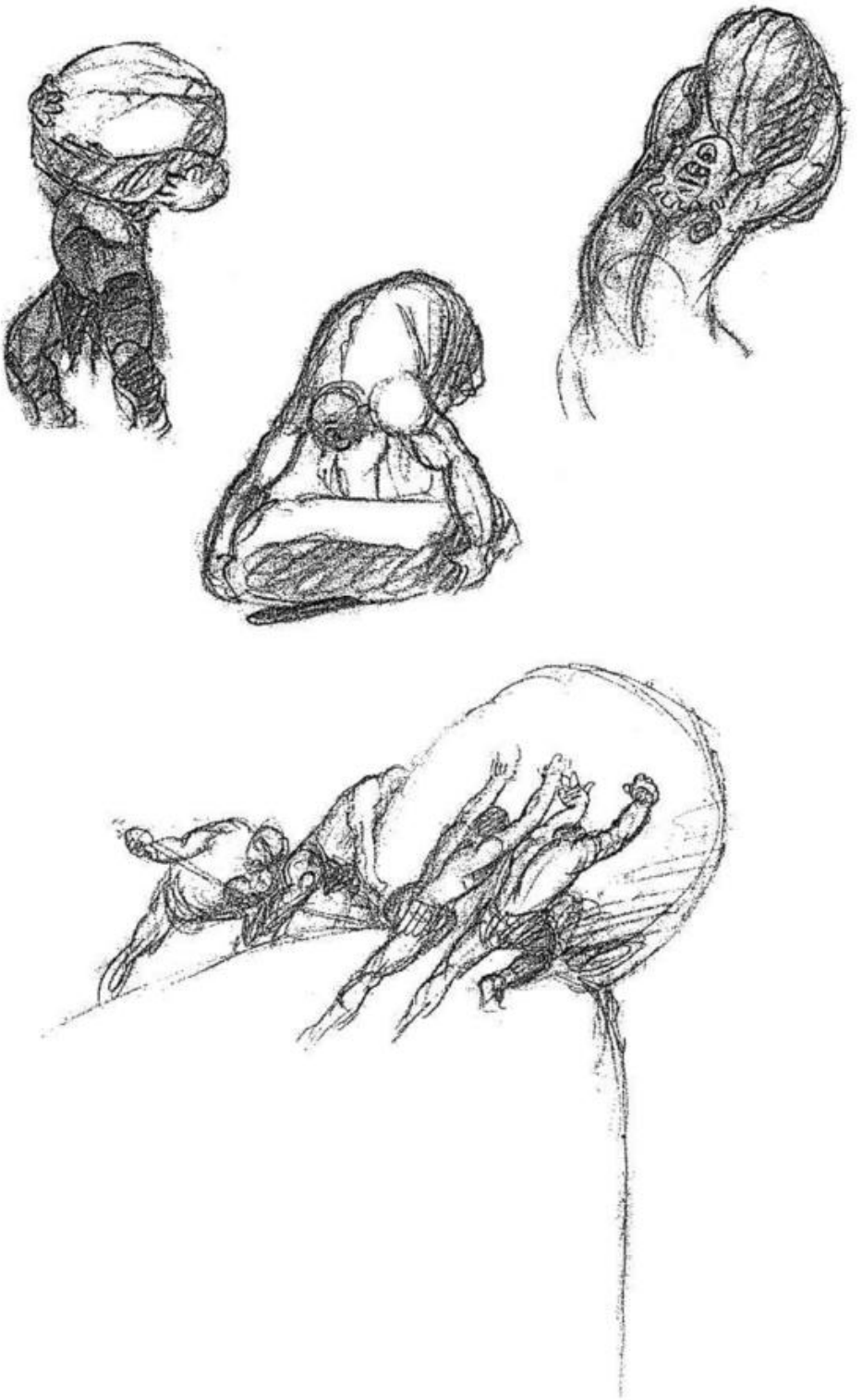


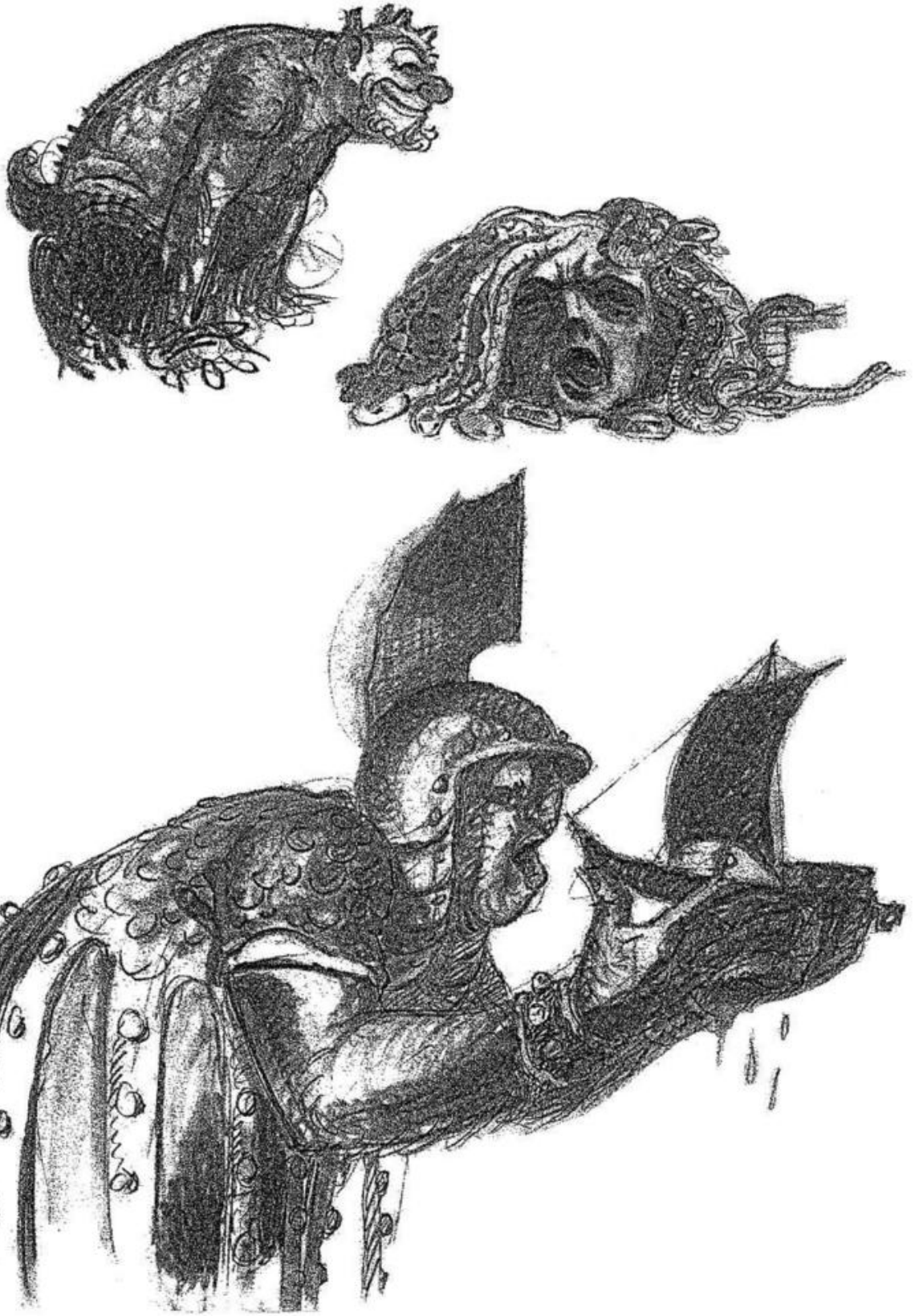


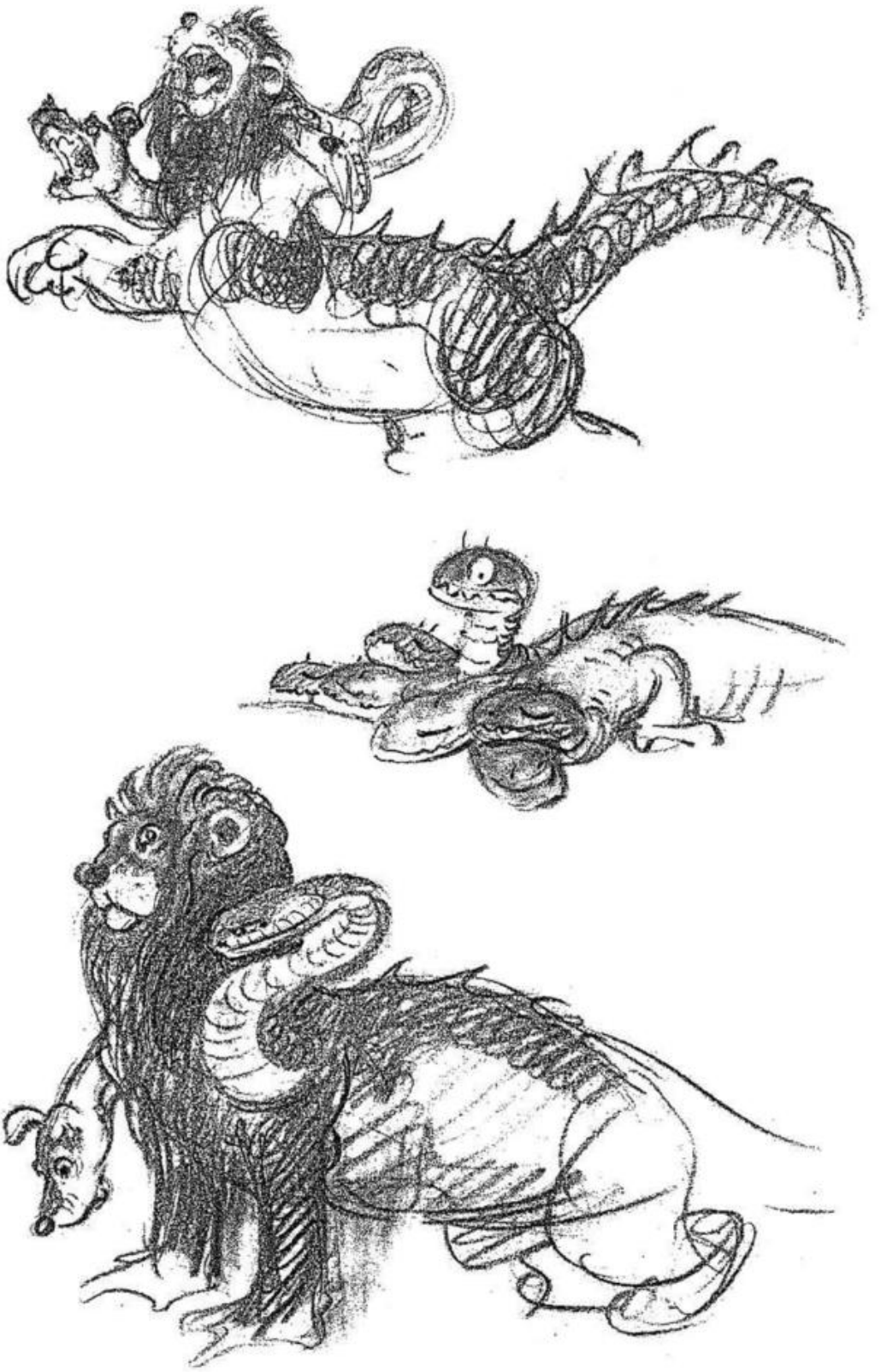


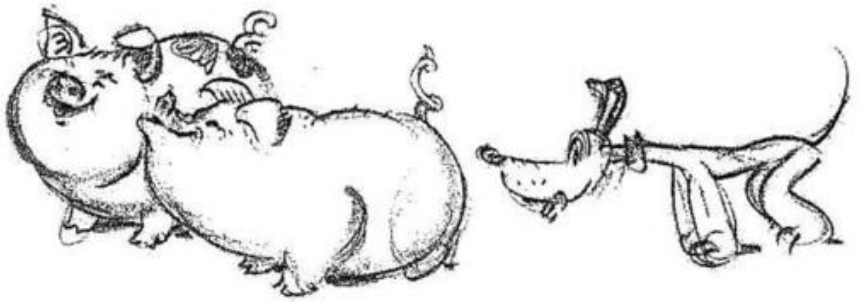


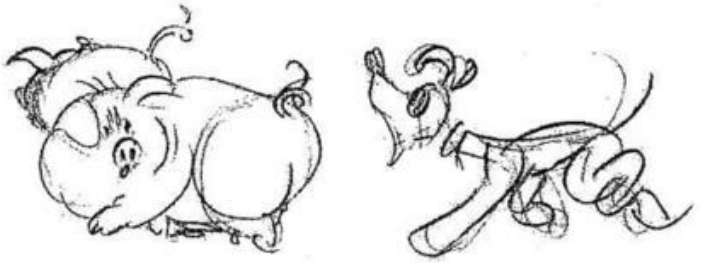


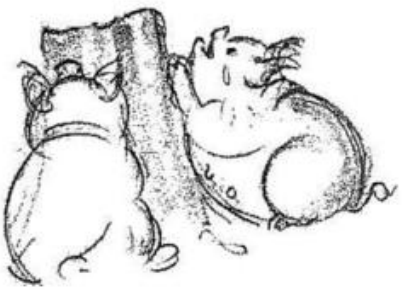


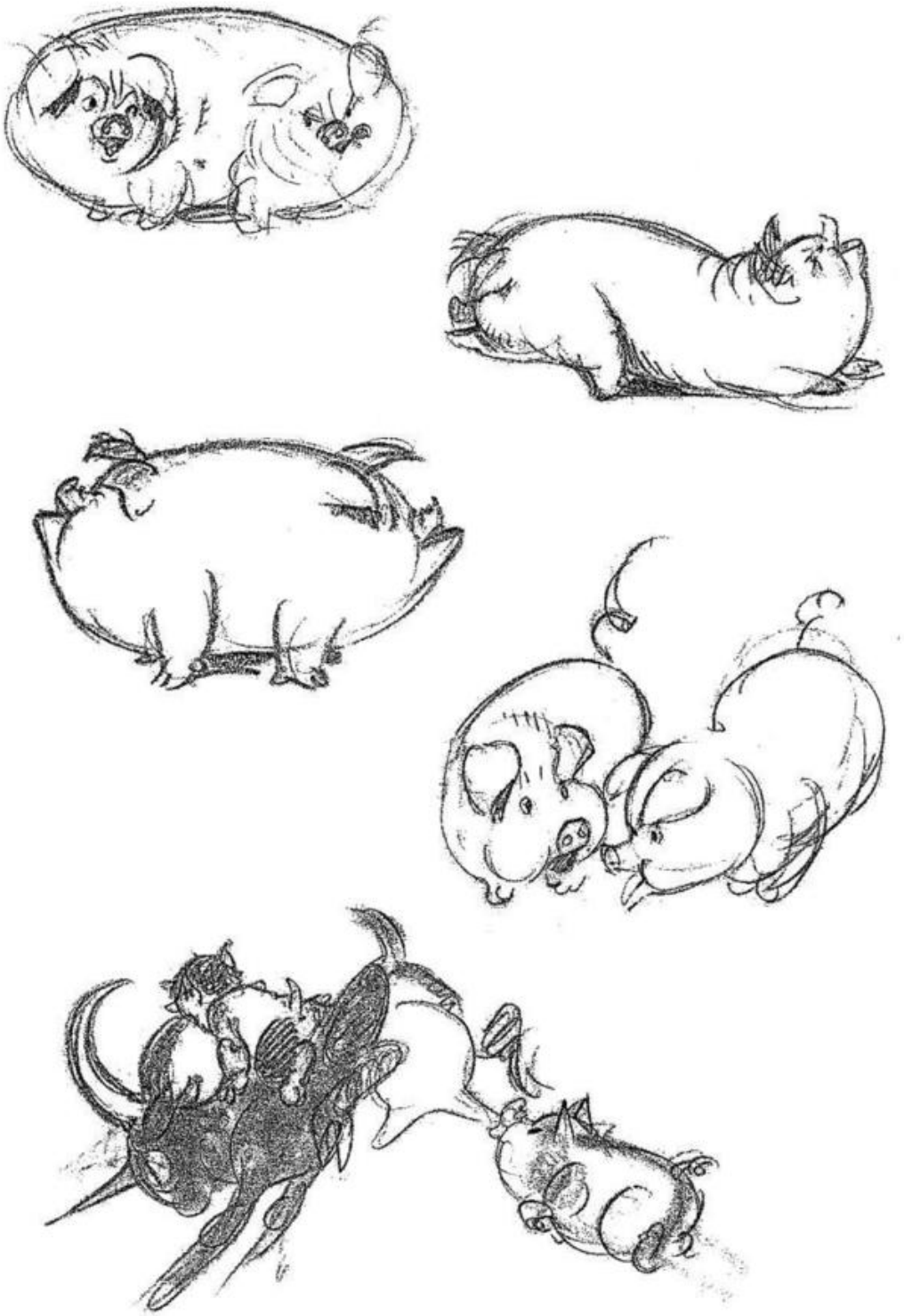


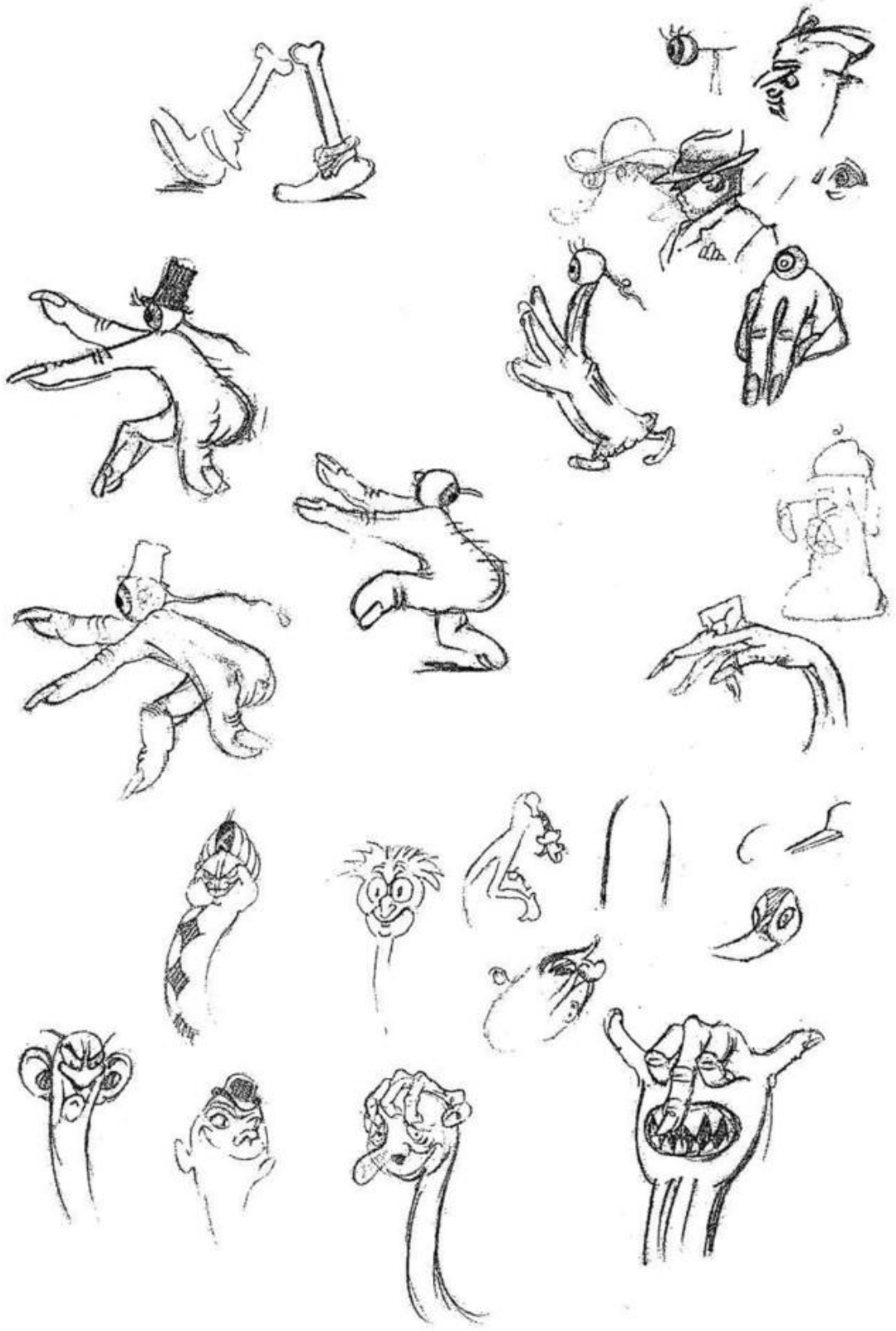


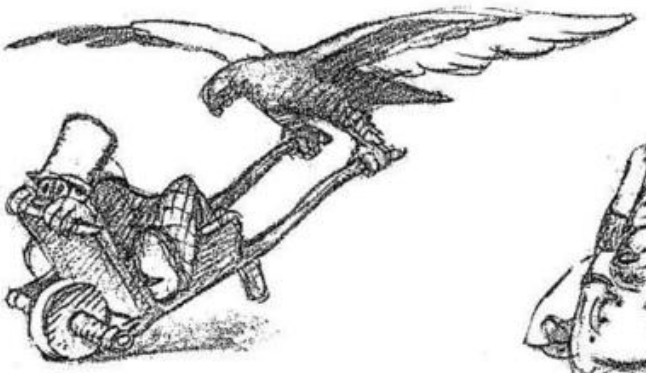


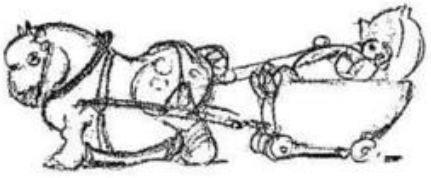


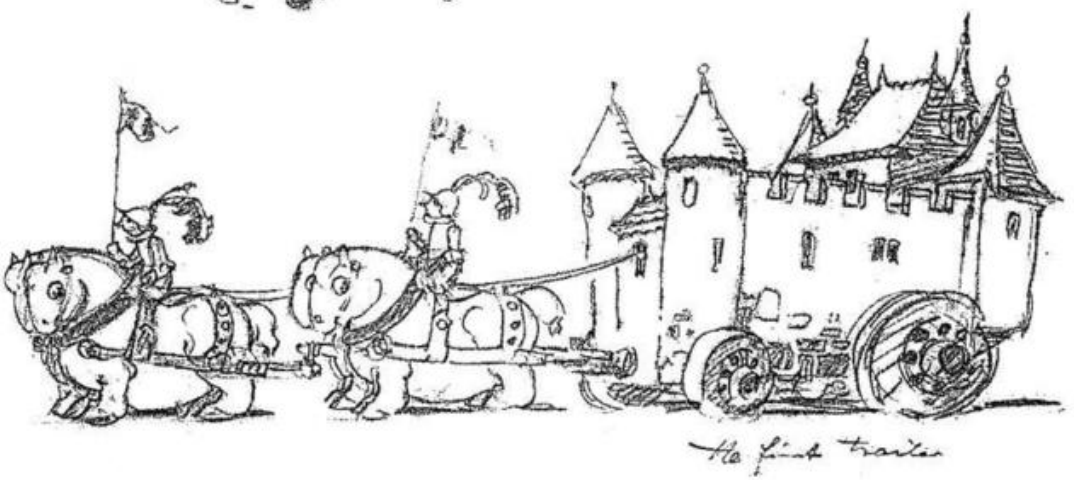


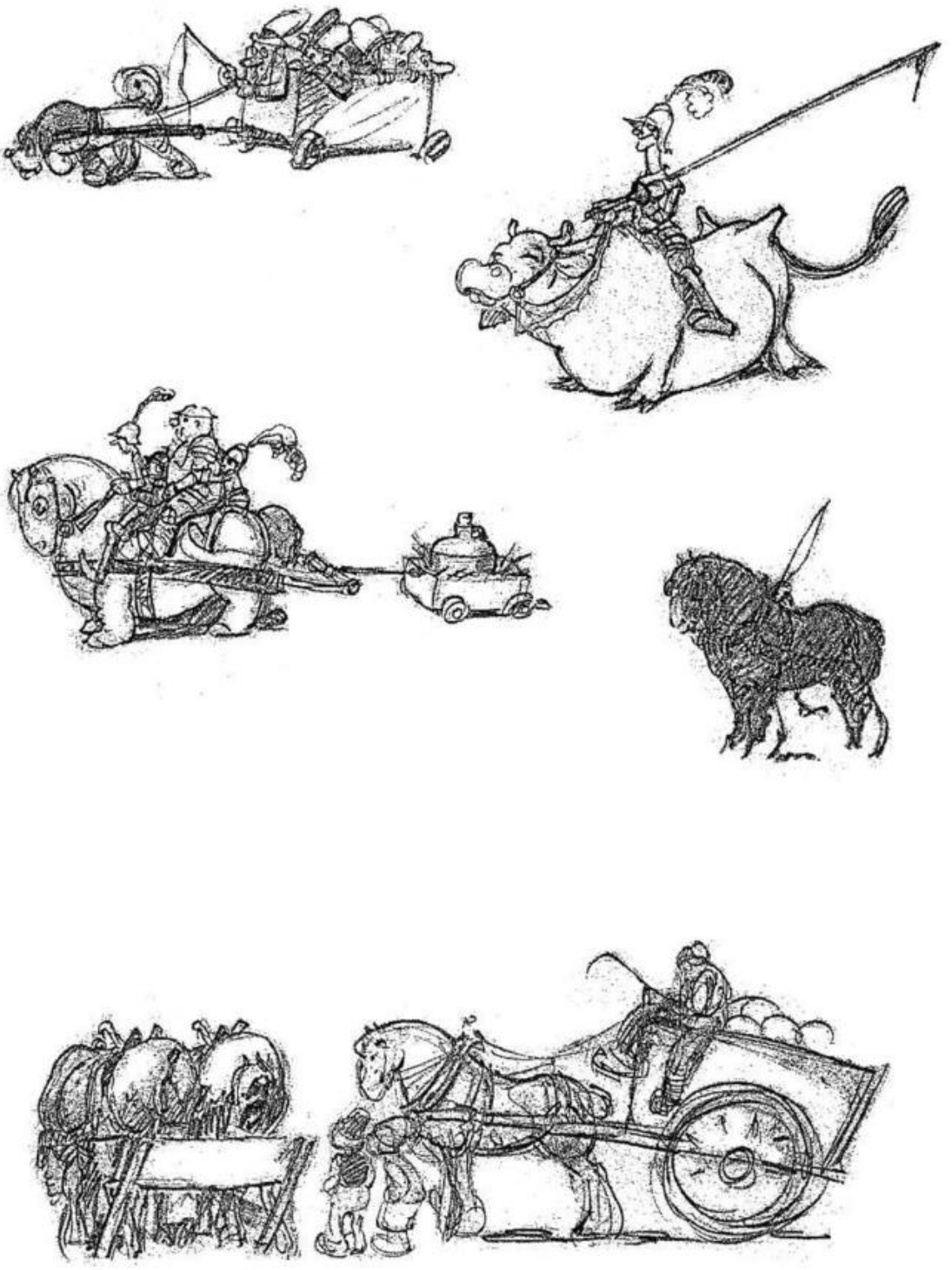


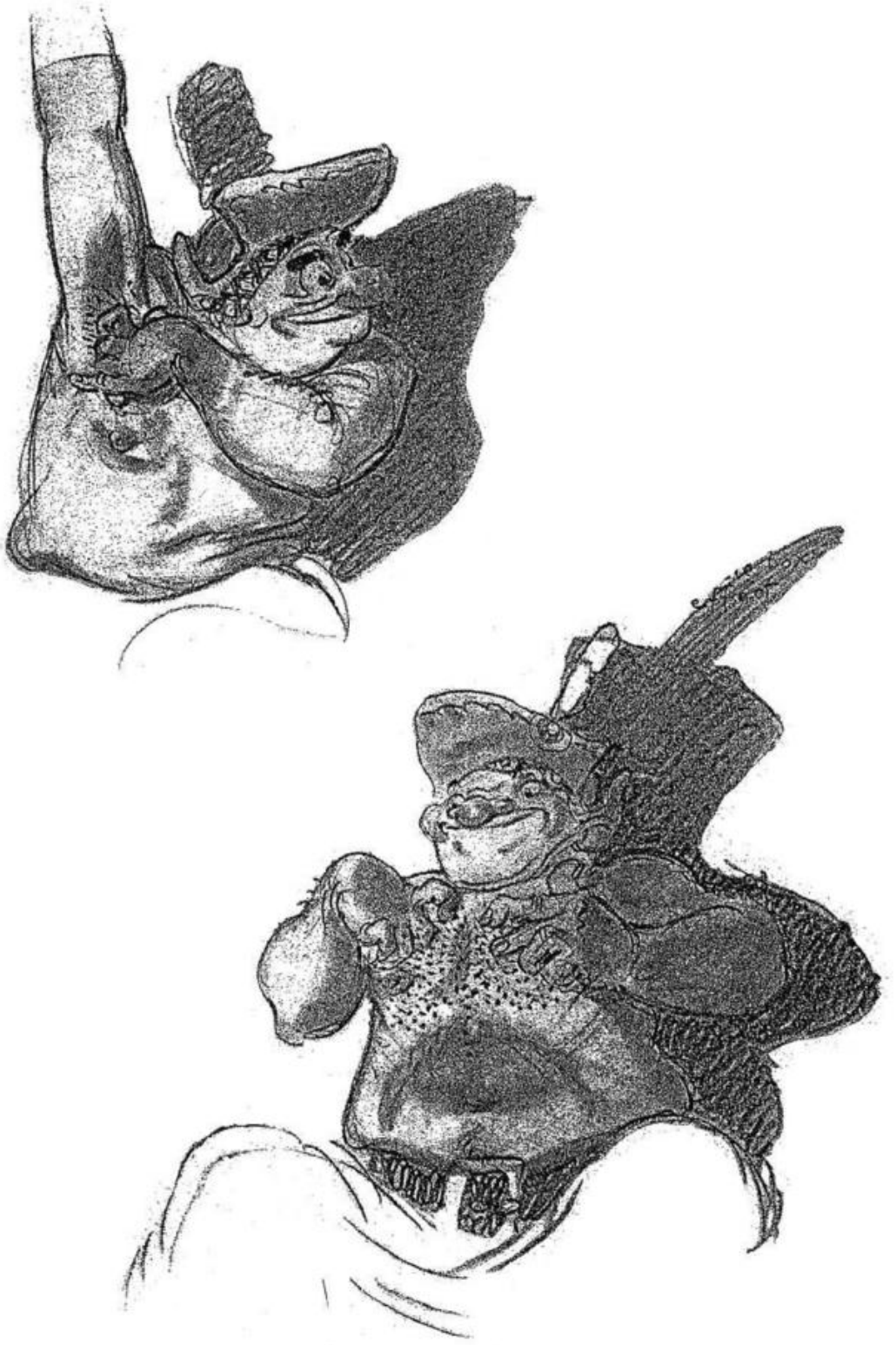


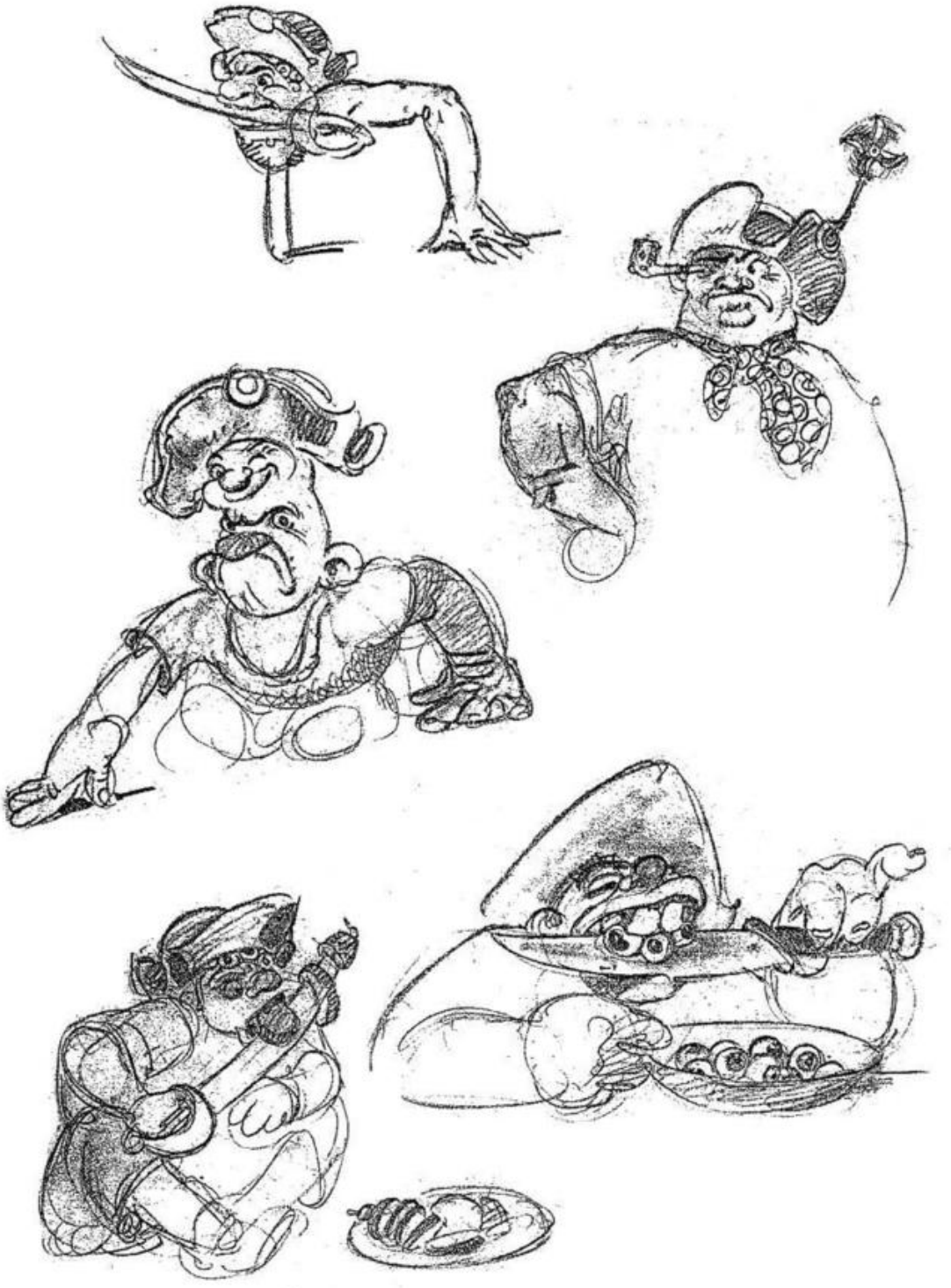


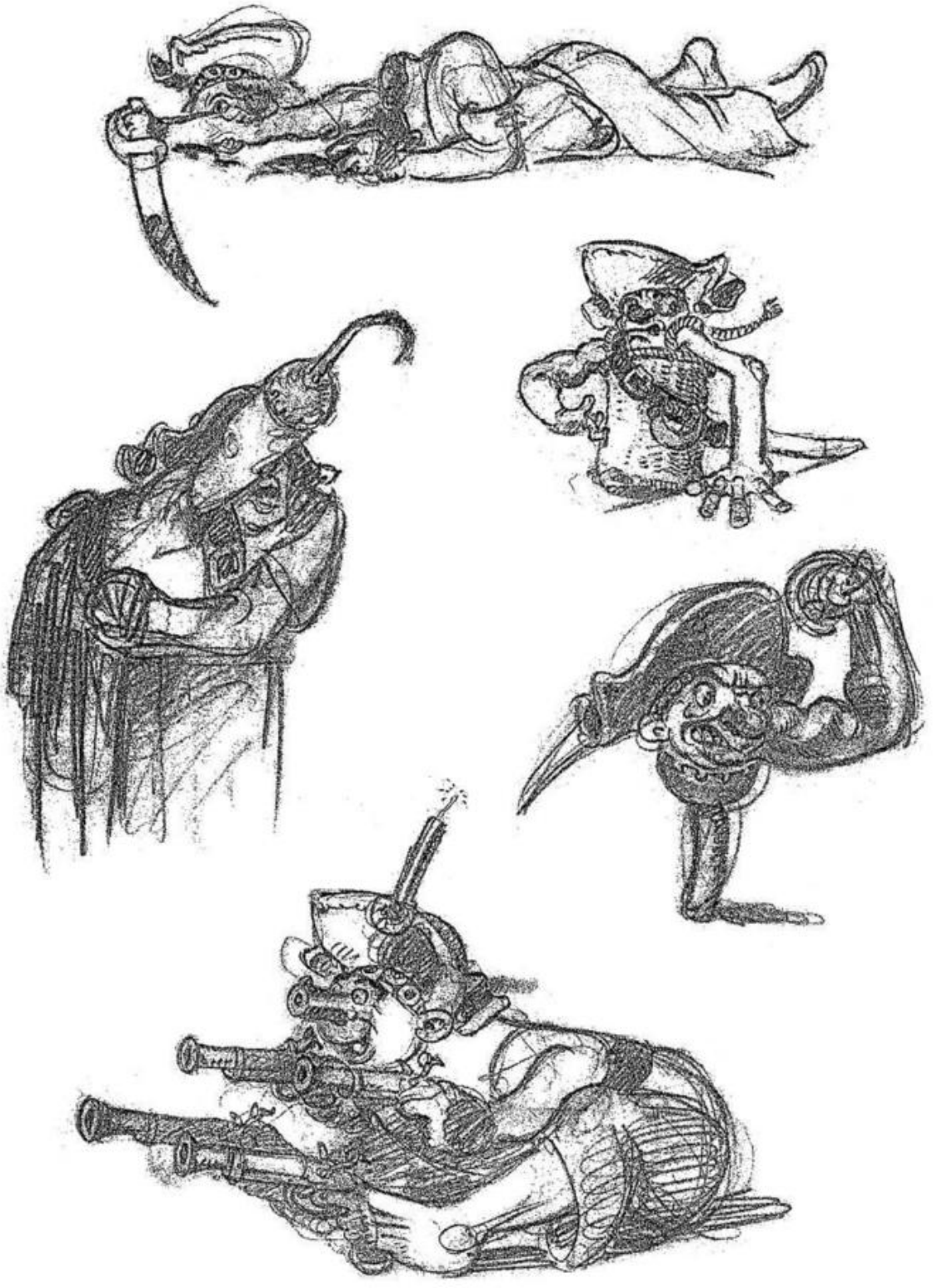


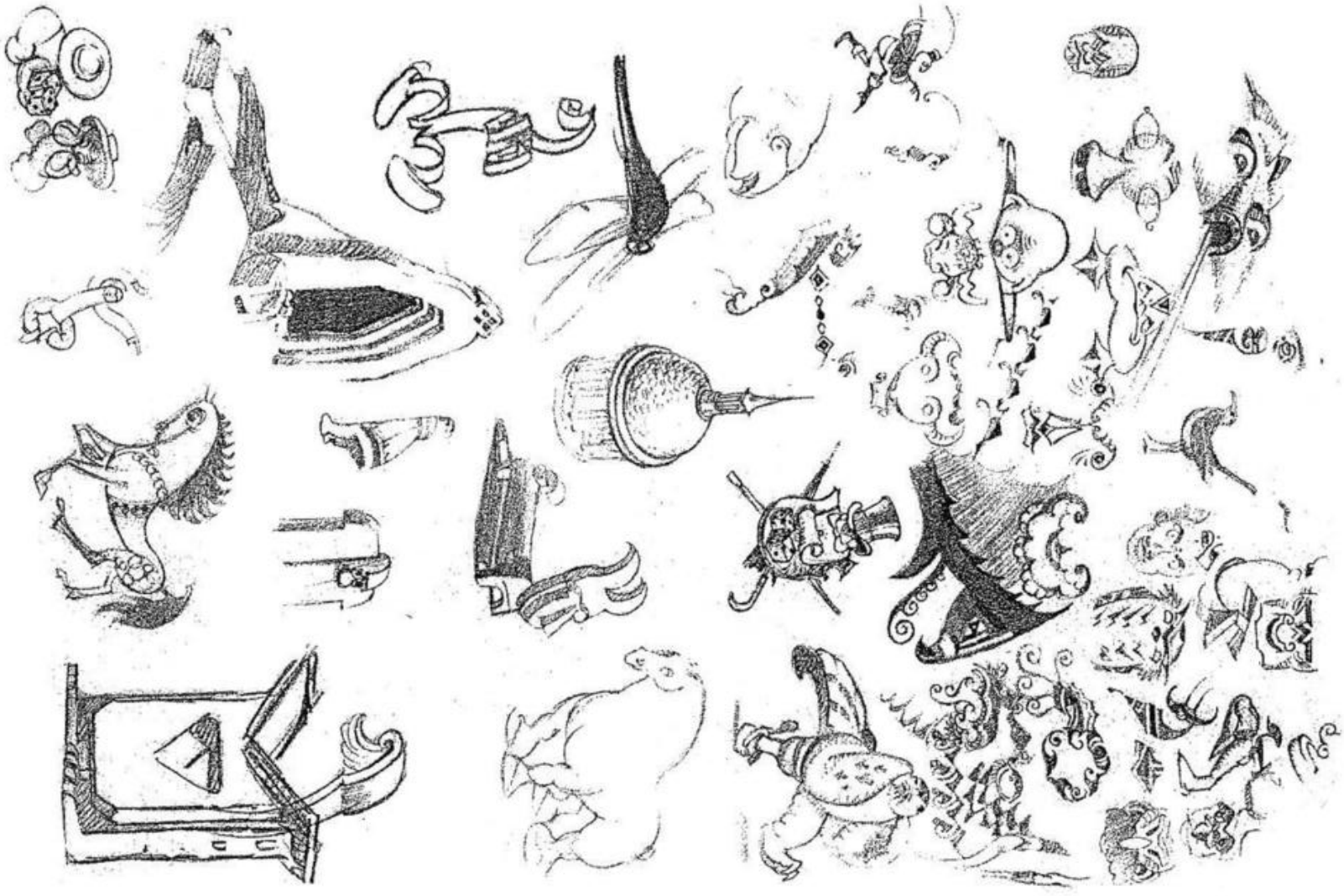


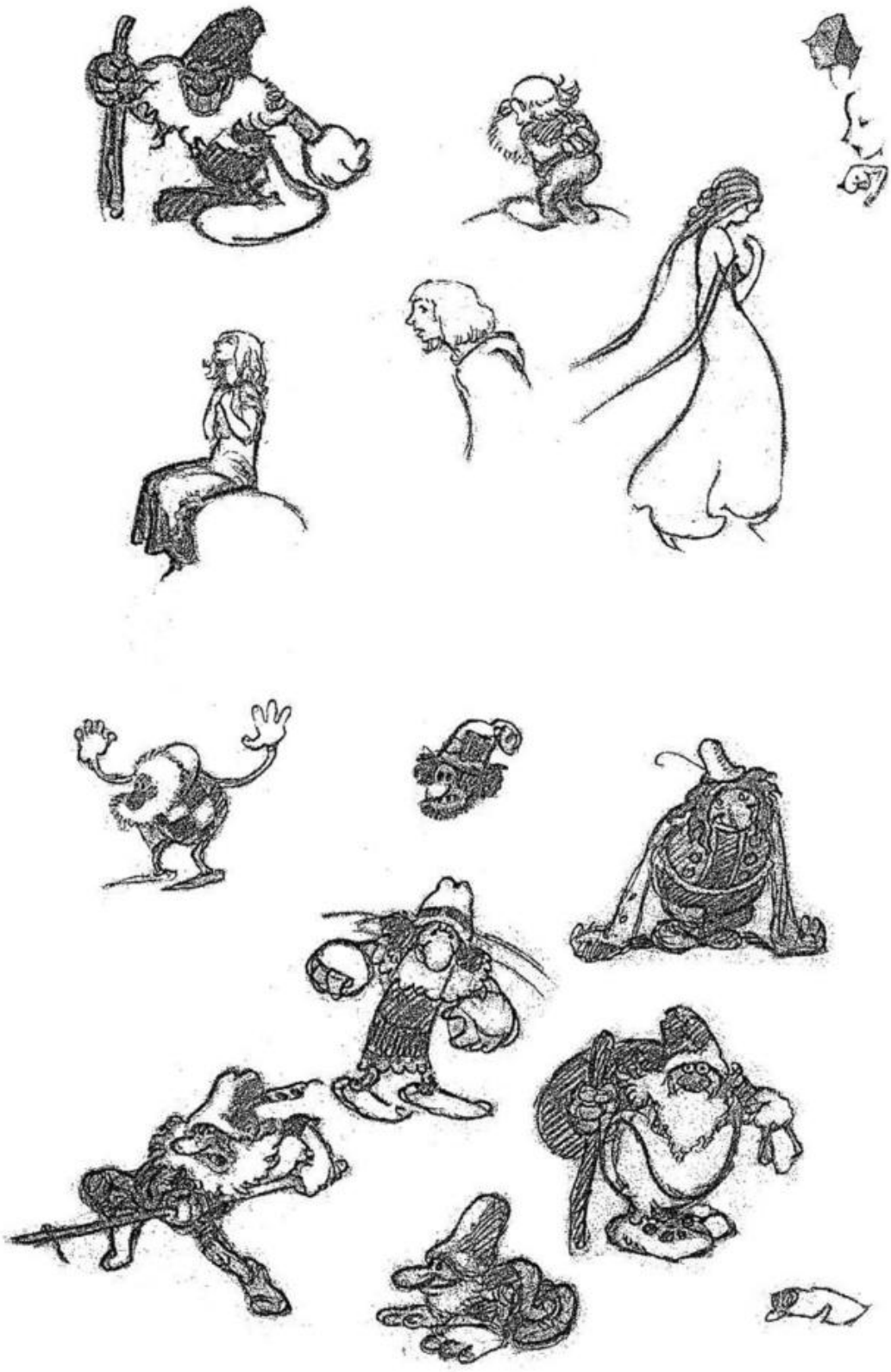


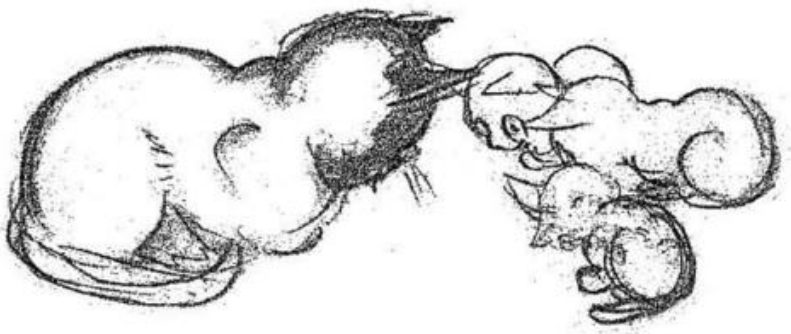


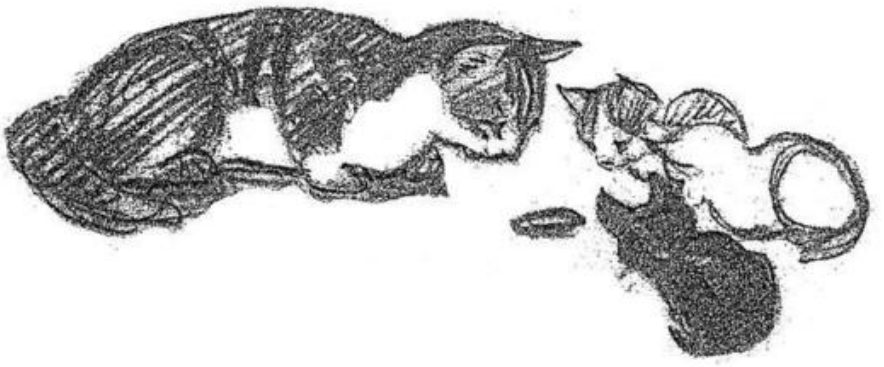


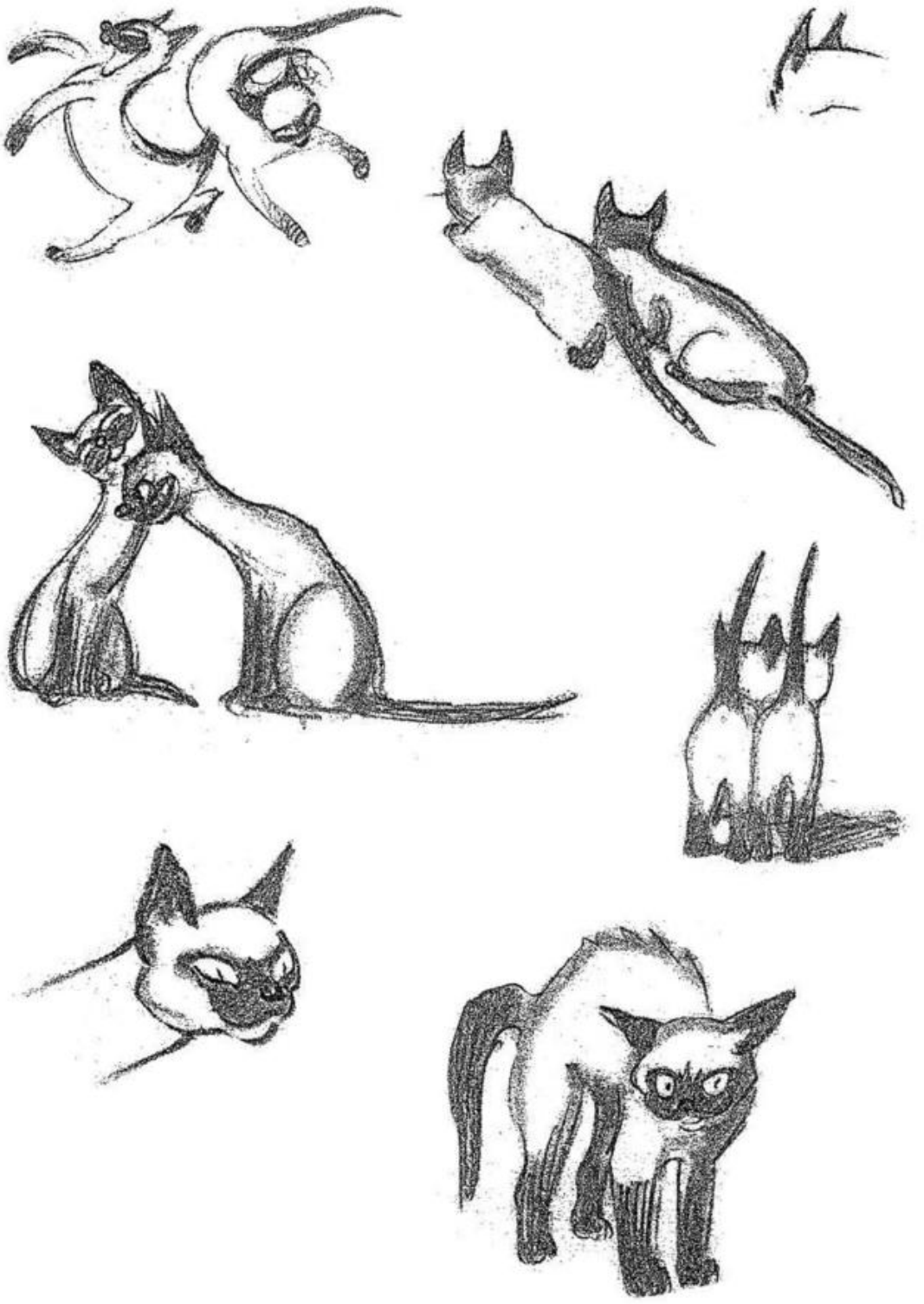


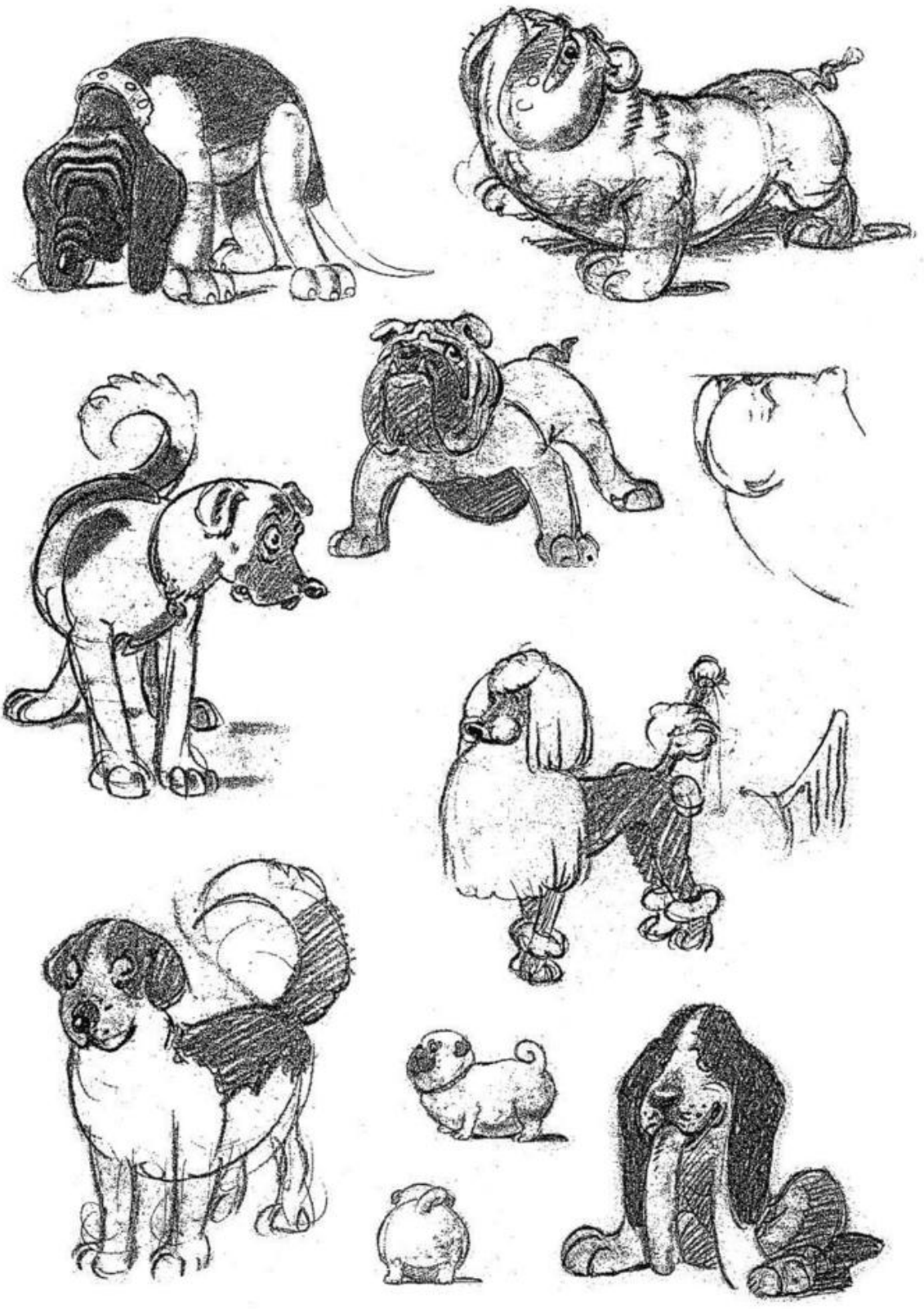


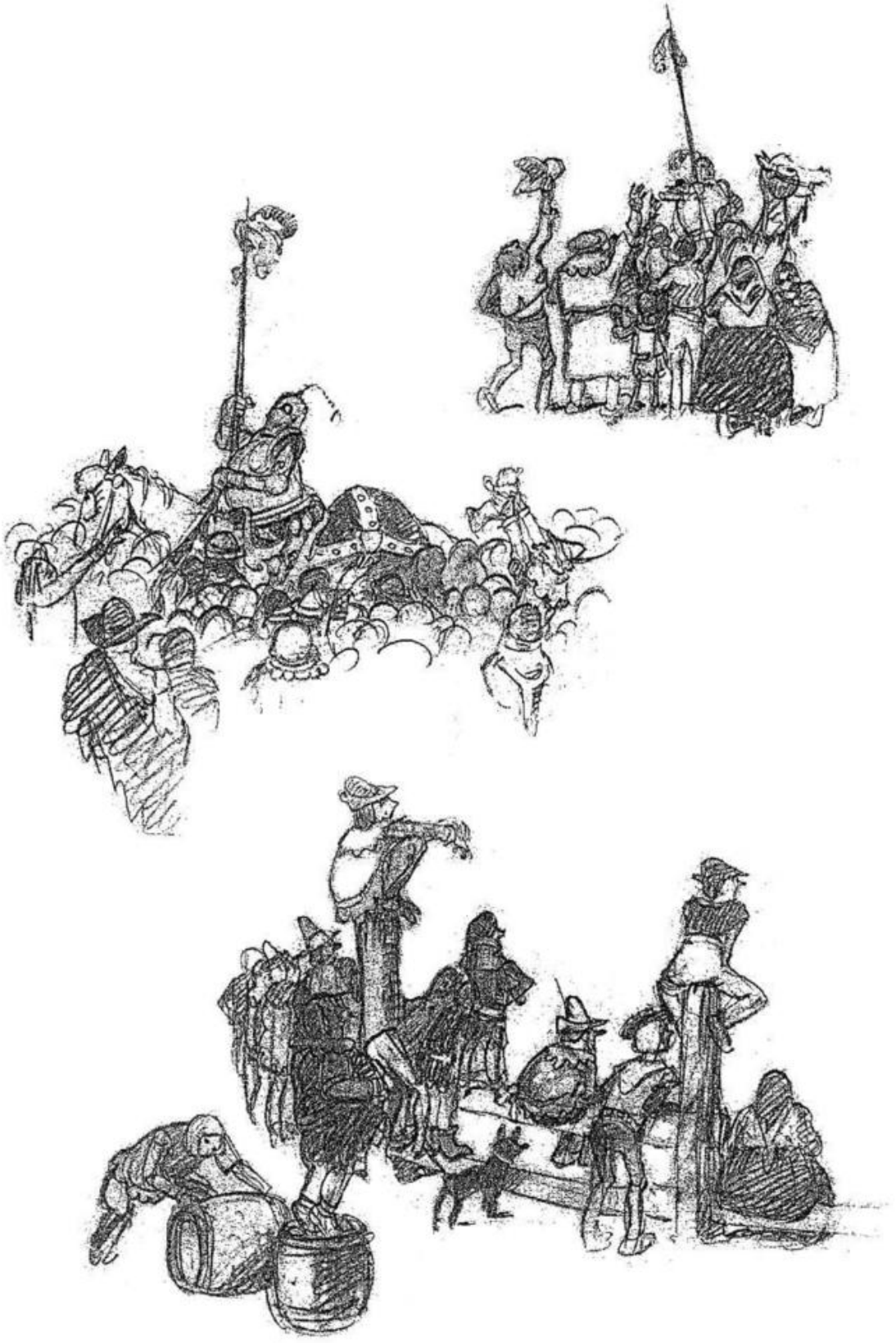


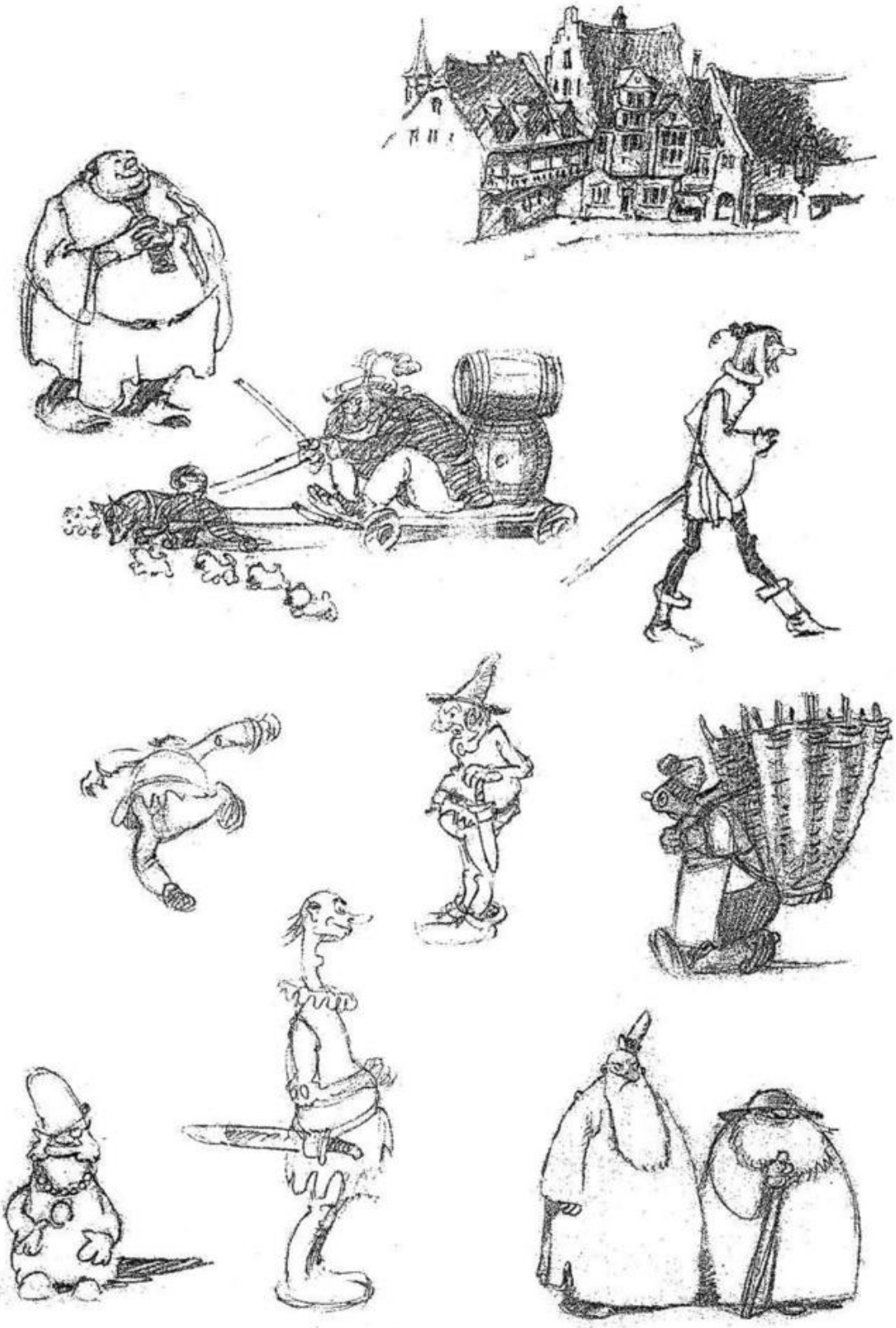


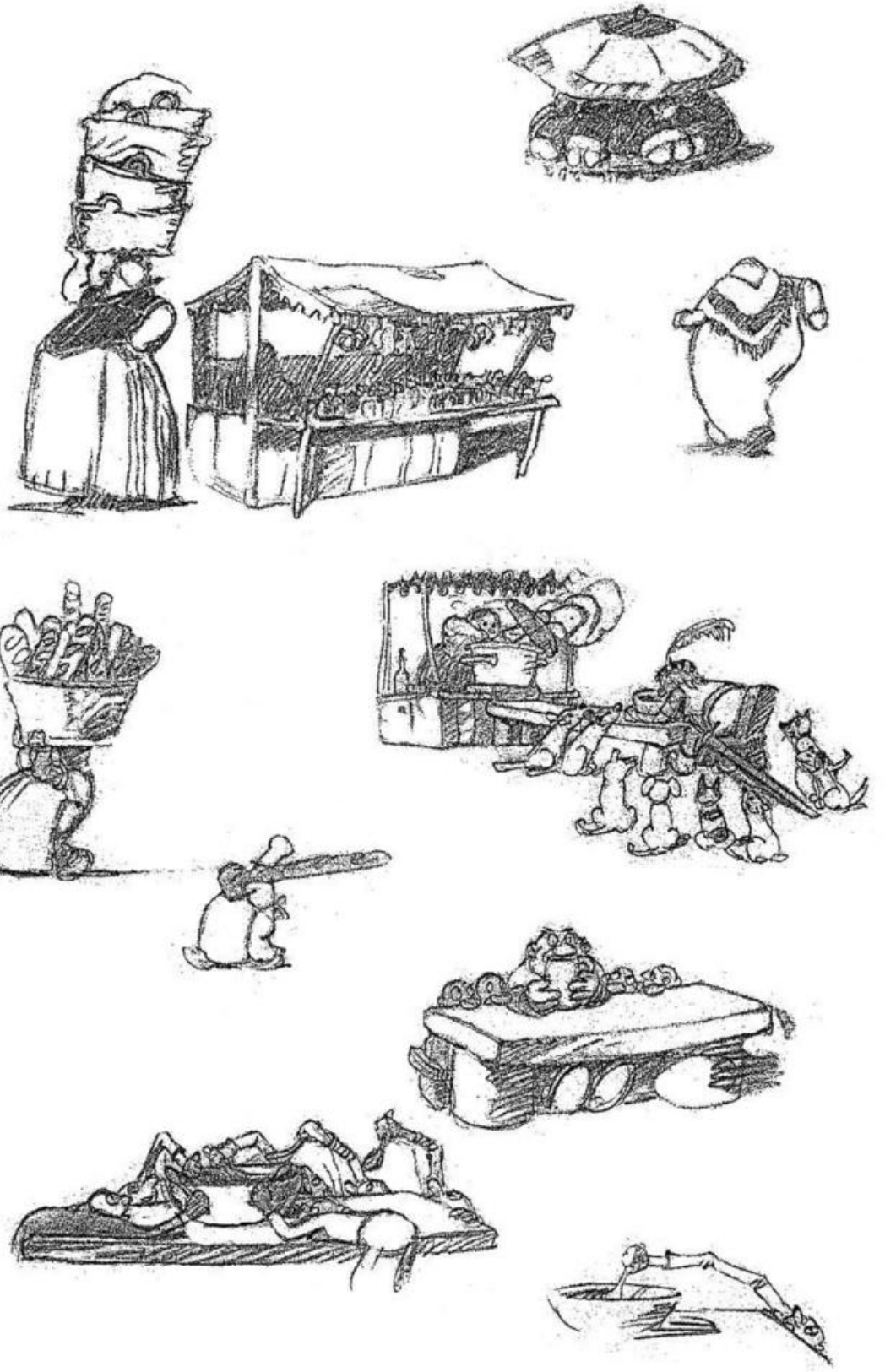


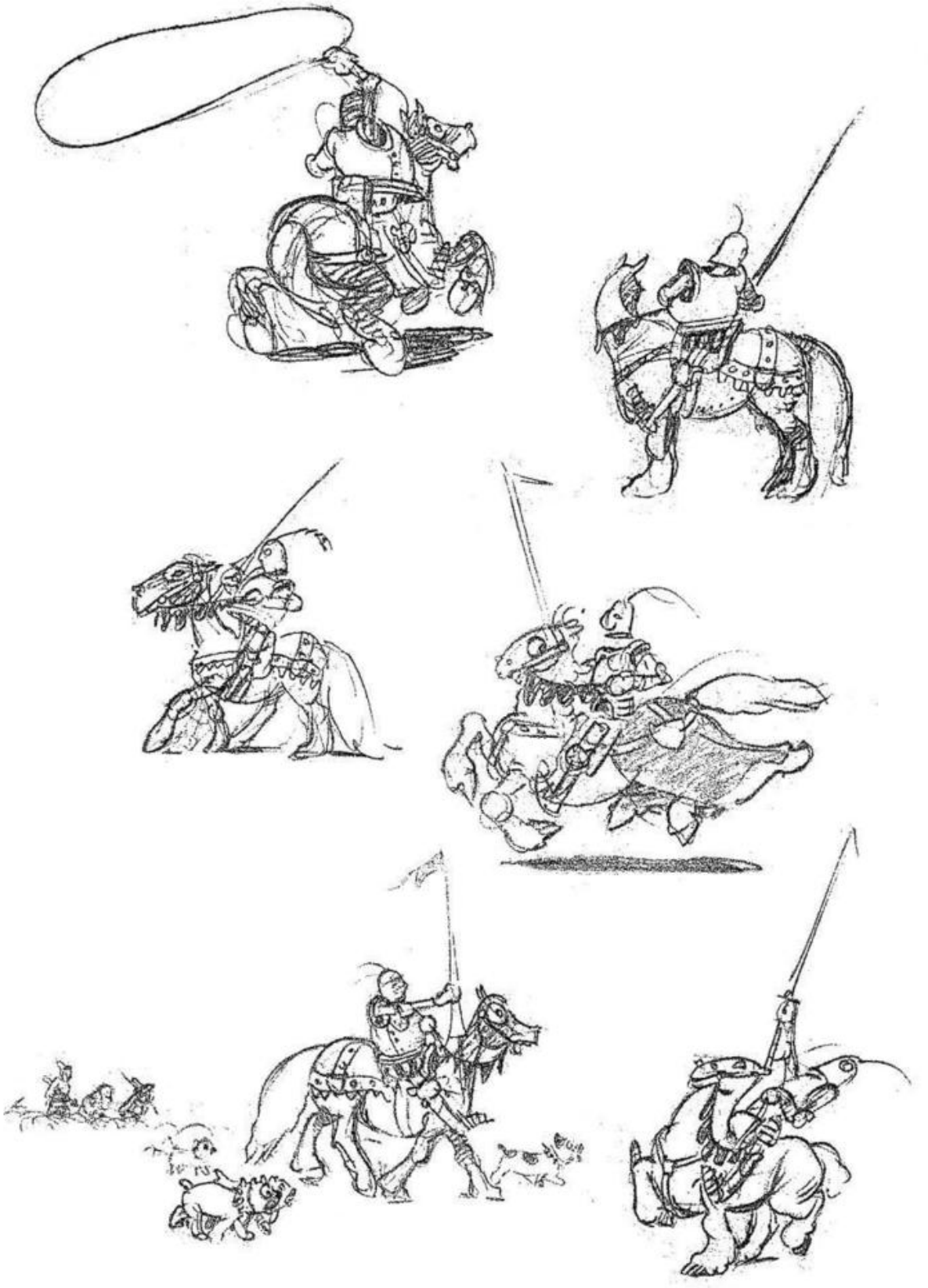


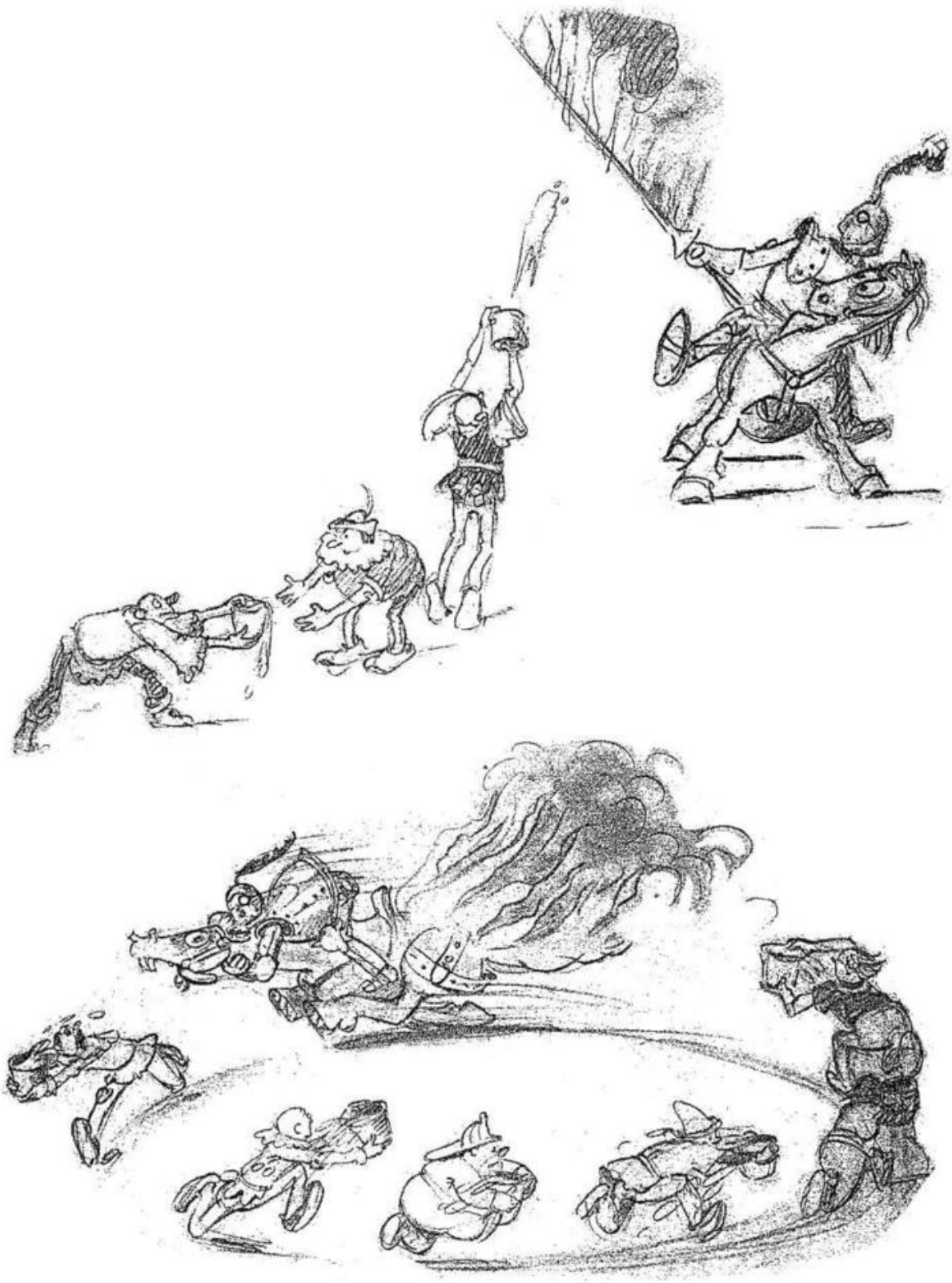


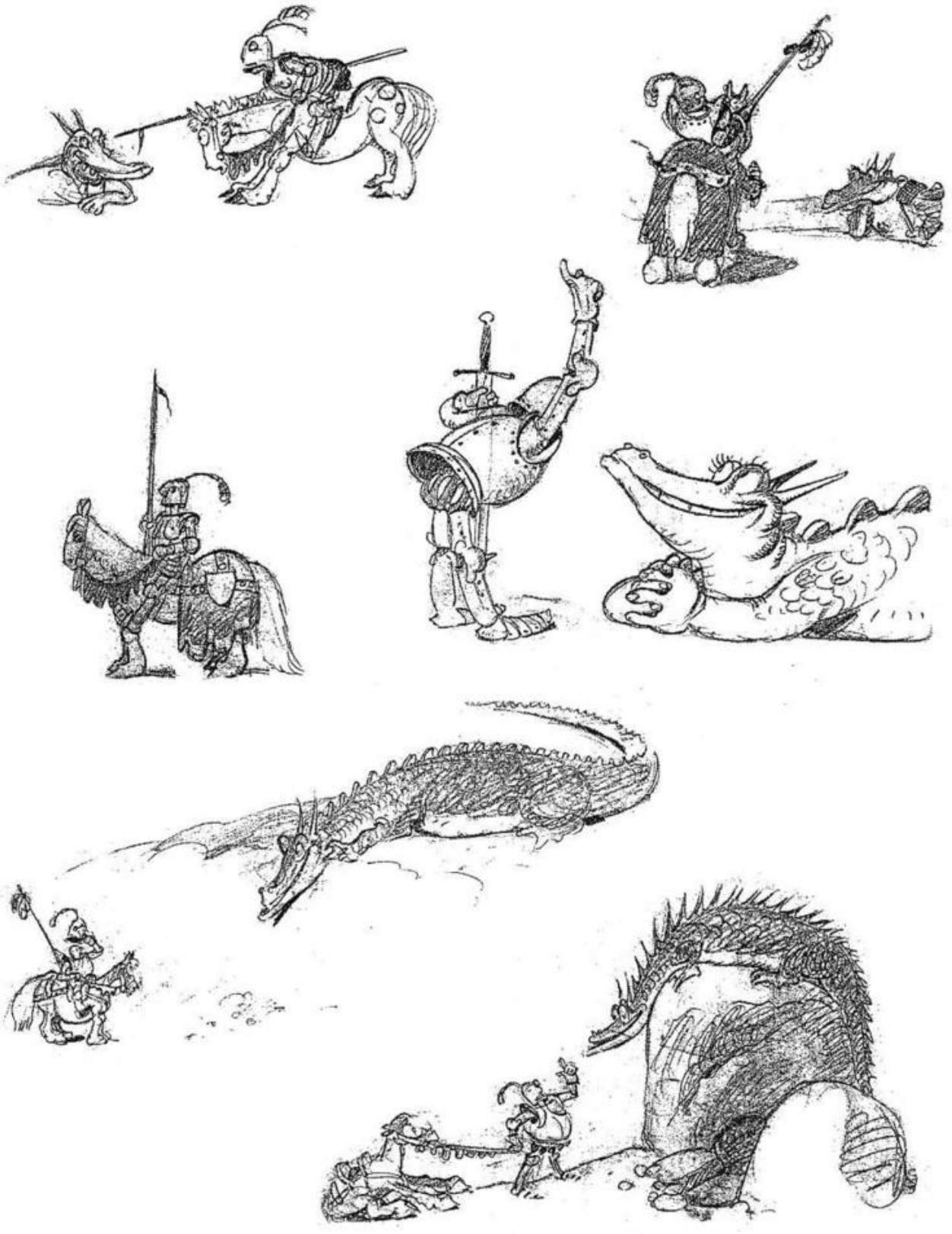


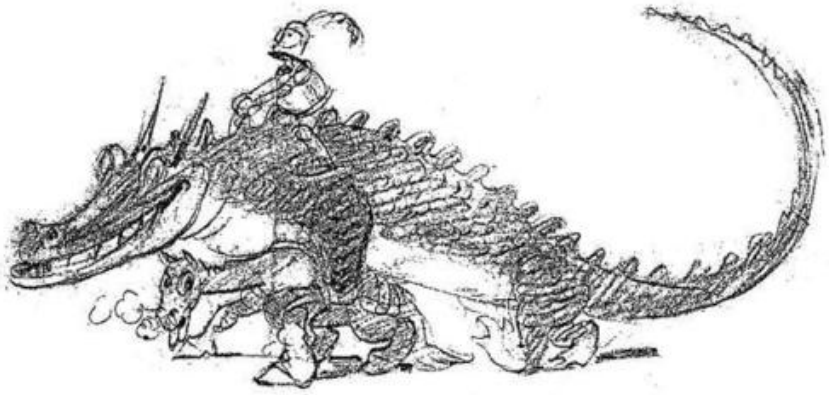


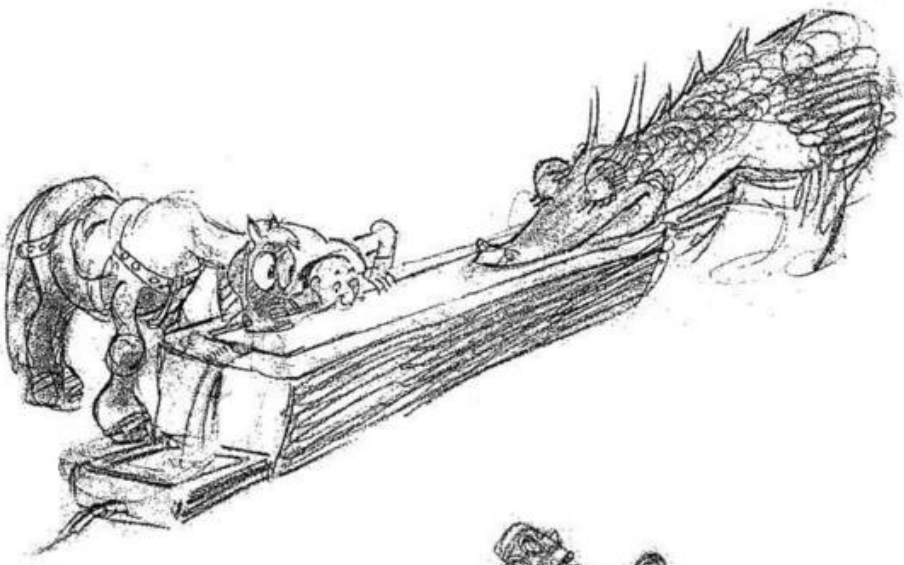


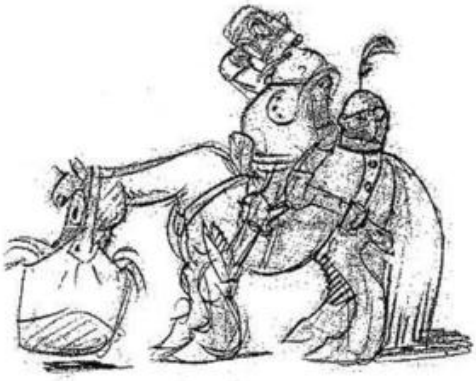


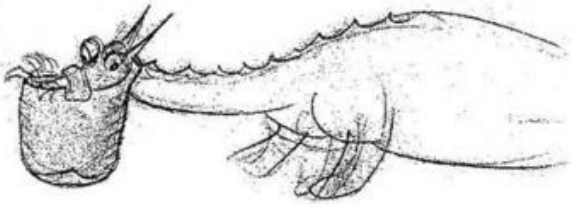


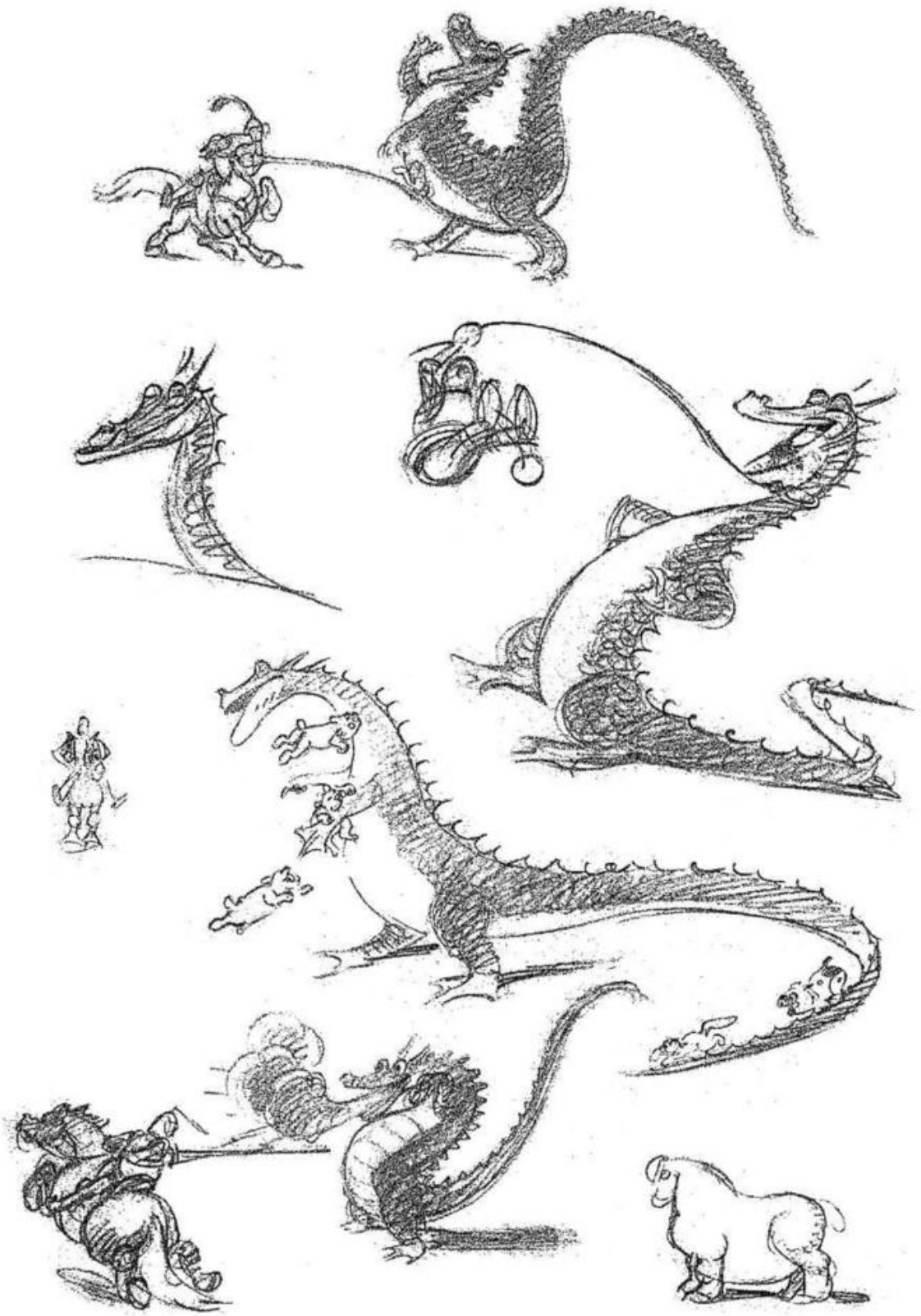


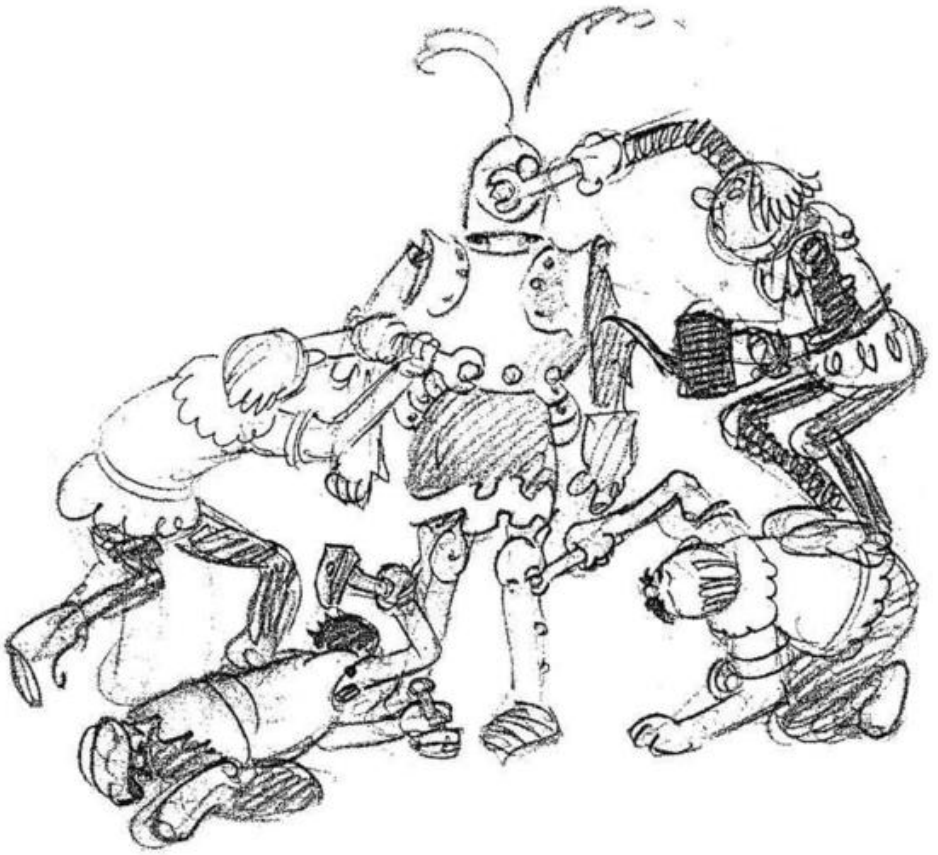


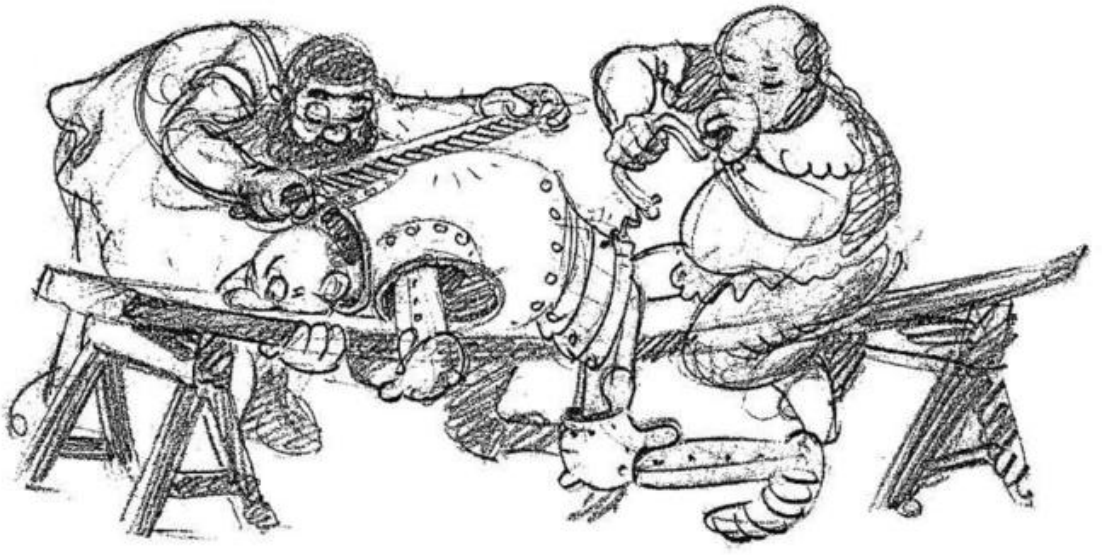


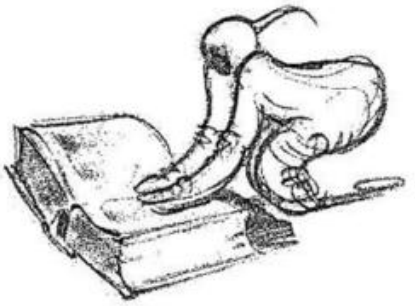


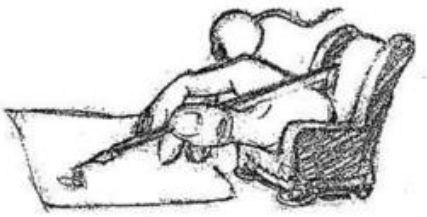


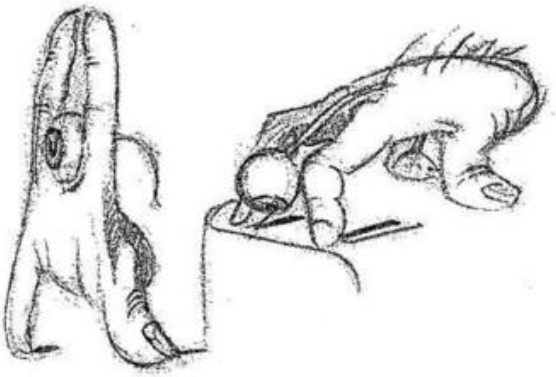


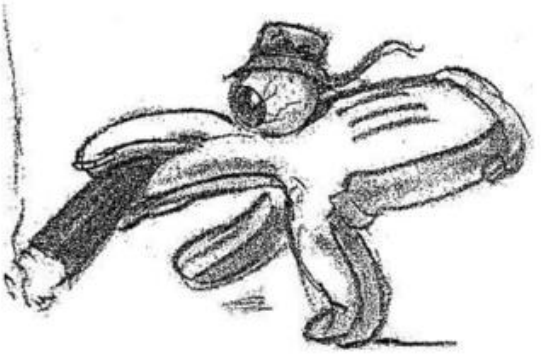


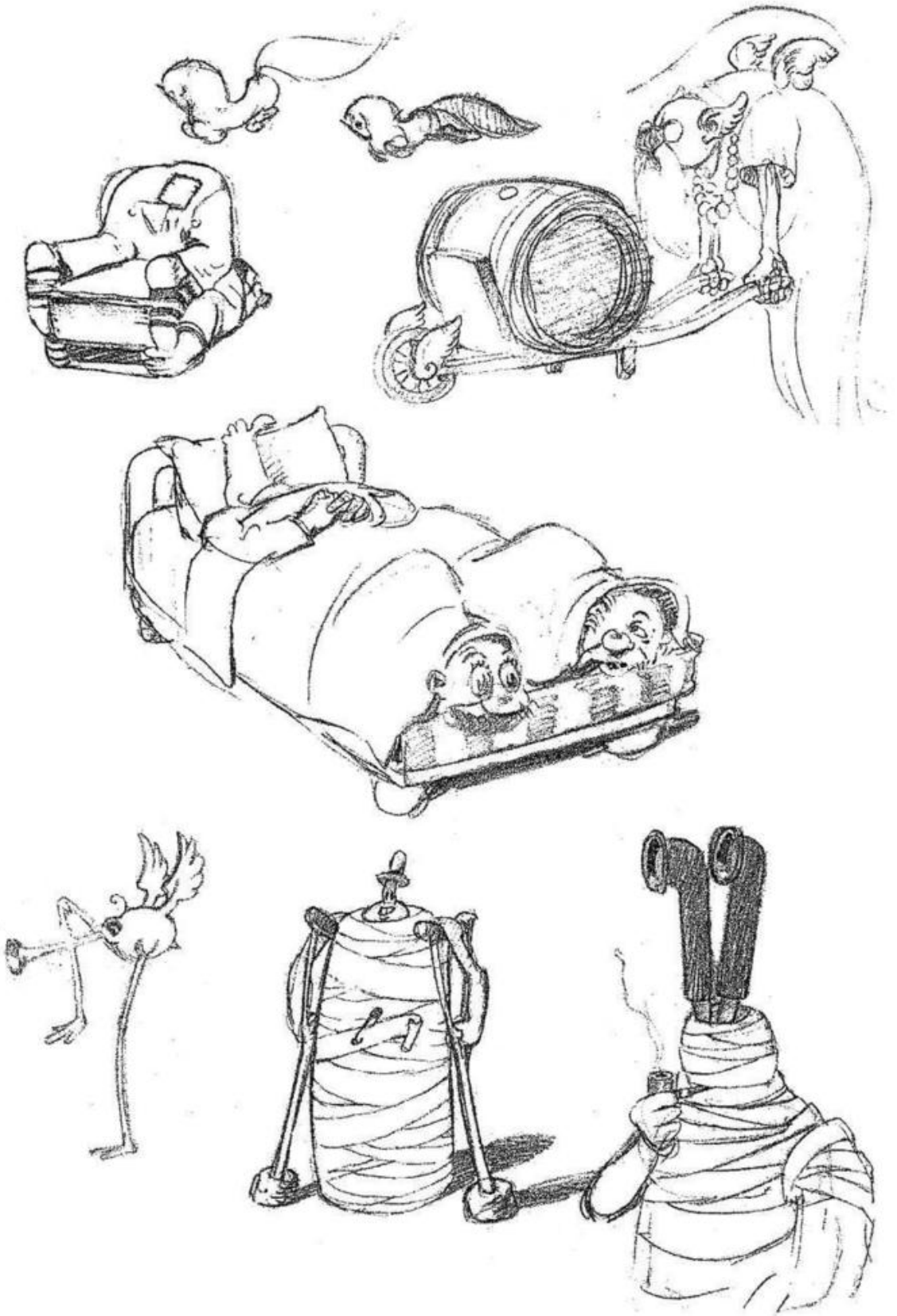












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